This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07492114 3

5/19

NBO
Hall, J.

NBC

PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
SOCIETY LIBRARY

"IF THERE WAS ANY REAL WATER IN THIS STREAM, I'D *drown* YOU, YOU INFERNAL IDIOT!"

Through Mocking Bird Gap

By

JARVIS HALL

Frontispiece by

JOSEPH M. CLEMENT

LC

THE PENN PUBLISHING
COMPANY PHILADELPHIA
1921

GA

NBO
H11

NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
103668B

COPYRIGHT
1921 BY
THE PENN
PUBLISHING
COMPANY

Through Mocking Bird Gap

NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

F

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	WHAT MR. ROGERS BROUGHT	7
II.	THE YOUNG MAN FROM NEW YORK	28
III.	VICTORIA	48
IV.	THE AIR PATROL	64
V.	THE HOUSE OF CARLOS BACA	78
VI.	ACROSS THE LINE	91
VII.	THE BARBECUE	108
VIII.	IN THE HANDS OF JIMENEZ	117
IX.	MIDNIGHT CALLERS	135
X.	JIM ROGERS	151
XI.	GEORGIA'S SCRAPE	173
XII.	IN WHICH VICTORIA ACTS	197
XIII.	A DESPERATE ATTEMPT	202
XIV.	IN THE GOATHERD'S TENT	222
XV.	MOCKING BIRD GAP	240
XVI.	ALEC'S STAND	261
XVII.	THE GIRL FROM NEW YORK	277
XVIII.	THE HOME TRAIL	297

Through Mocking Bird Gap

CHAPTER I

WHAT MR. ROGERS BROUGHT

It was nearing five o'clock of an August afternoon and the town of Angus, New Mexico, was just awaking to the proximity of mail time. In other words, Mrs. Patterson was descending slowly the hilly path which led from her cabin up at the mill, to the post-office which was located at the Company House a quarter of a mile below; while Georgia Phelps, postmistress, had opened the door of the Company House, and was peering up the road toward the Divide, at which point Mr. Henry Rogers, known to the neighborhood as "Uncle Henry," and his mule, faithful partner in the R. F. D. industry, might be expected to make their appearance.

There were a dozen other inhabitants of Angus—more, if you counted all of Mrs. Judson's youngsters, which no one ever did as their number changed too frequently—but when you have named

Mrs. Patterson and Georgia Phelps, you have named the really representative citizens of the town; for Angus, as a town, resembled the famous Mrs. Harris as a woman—it was quite mythical. The Angus Mining and Improvement Company, with its large and commodious Company House, built in a pocket of the mountains, and its plant and offices, with cabins for the workers, located half-way up toward the Divide, was really Angus. The neighborhood included a few families who dwelt under the Company's wing, owned claims upon which the Company held options, and worked about the mine in various capacities when it was in operation.

The post-office was located in the Company House, and Georgia, daughter of the manager of the Company, had been installed as postmistress, ever since her return from boarding-school some two or three years previous.

North of Angus, over the Divide, was Lobo, a tiny town with a post-office and a general merchandise store; and some miles further on and toward the west, lay Carrizo, dignified by its position on the railroad line. To the south was Mesa, a small hamlet, perilously near that border which has been so troublesome these last few years. Still further south lay Texas Park, a nest of ranchers, some people were disagreeable enough to call them horse thieves, who lived in the foot-hills and minded their

own business, seldom disturbed by their neighbors. So far, Mesa, in spite of her dangerous proximity to the border, had dwelt in peace and safety, whether because, as Uncle Henry put it, "there wa'n't nothin' in the durned place to steal except young ones," or on account of her rather sinister neighbors in Texas Park, who were reputed to have "understandings" with the bandits on the other side, we may not say.

The Angus Mining and Improvement Company was in one of its periods of discouragement due to a temporary lack of funds, an embarrassing condition which afflicts companies as well as individuals. During the war, it had seemed wise to close the plant altogether, but now, with the looking up of business, the Company had called a meeting of its stockholders, in New York, and it was to this meeting that Georgia's father had gone, taking her mother with him.

As the girl stood on the veranda that August afternoon, she saw the same sight which she saw every day in the year, but which never failed to make her give a little shiver of delight, for Georgia was a mountain worshipper. Back of her rose the Company House, a two story and attic frame building, with two long verandas running across its front—an odd sight in New Mexico, where they run to adobe. Across the road was the barn and the

corral, while all around, on every side, rose the glorious mountains—some green with pines, some bare but for a stunted undergrowth, and one or two in the distance, white tipped even in August.

Georgia, herself, if not as gloriously beautiful as the mountains, was good to look upon. Not too tall, she had the firm, rounded figure of a young girl, with the quickness and agility of a boy. Her hair was yellow and rather curly, and her skin, which in a kinder climate might have been prettily pink, was tanned to a warm brown. It was her eyes, however, which gave her her first claim to good looks. They were of an old Irish blue, with a Killarney twinkle in them; eyes that were not above giving you a bit of blarney now and then, when their owner wanted something rather badly; eyes that had been brought over from the old sod by Mr. Phelps' maternal grandmother, and which had turned a trick or two long before they came to Georgia.

Mrs. Patterson descended the hill slowly, not because she was in any way infirm, not even because the altitude was discouraging to speed, but because she disapproved of hills. Back in Illinois, where Mrs. Patterson hailed from, and which she privately considered God's country, they did not have mountains, which were useless things, productive principally of disturbing activities on the part of

the male sex, such as mining and hunting. In Illinois, one had sidewalks, and running water, even in small towns, and neighbors that one didn't have to walk half a mile down-hill to see. Mrs. Patterson was a conscientious woman. Having promised before witnesses to cleave to Jim Patterson for better or for worse, she intended to live up to her bargain, but she never allowed him to forget that she considered New Mexico the threatened "worse."

She was a thin, energetic woman of about sixty. Her hair, dark and plentiful, was knotted tightly at the back of her head, and her eyes, brown and snappy, added to the swarthiness which a rather sallow complexion gave to her appearance. She sank, panting, into a chair on the porch.

"Land sakes! I'm that tired of tramping down that old hill—I reckon there's only one thing I hate more and that's tramping up it."

"Well, rest yourself and watch the sun lighting up Sunset Park," said Georgia, sympathetically. "You can't see that from your place, can you?"

"No, but I don't mind. I tell you what, Georgia, I'm about sick of seein' things. I'd like to hear a few things just for a change."

"It is awfully quiet, but I can't bear the noise of cities."

"Well, I could if I could get a chance." Mrs. Patterson's voice had an injured tinge to it. "I'm

sick and tired of this everlastin' peace and quiet. I've bought me a rooster just to have somethin' around the place with a voice."

"Where did you get him?" demanded Georgia. In rural New Mexico even so small a matter as the purchase of a rooster has its fascination.

"I ain't got him yet. I bought him from Rufus West. He wants to get rid of him because he fights. I don't care if he does. Since my old rooster died and Jim went to New York, to that stockholders' meeting, it's been as quiet as a churchyard up at the mill. Me and the hens will both be the cheerfuller for a little male society. Uncle Henry's late again, ain't he?"

"A little."

"I dunno which is the laziest, him or that mule."

"It's a long pull," remonstrated the postmistress. "Up-hill nearly all the way till you get to the Divide."

"That ain't what keeps him." Mrs. Patterson's voice was scornful. "Him and Pop Henderson, the postmaster at Lobo, always have to get thro' just so much gab. I've heard 'em. Talk about women gossipin'! I'll bet you more reputations is busted when those two old duffers get together over a sack of mail than in any sewin' circle back in Illinois. Speakin' of Illinois, I'd ought to get a letter from Mary to-night." Mary was a married daughter liv-

ing in Pana, whose letters were a source of mingled joy and pain to Mrs. Patterson, who envied her passionately.

"I suppose Mary's very happy with the new baby?"

"Happy? Of course she's happy. Why wouldn't she be, married to a man who's content to stay where the Lord put him instead of strayin' into the tents of Kedar?"

"Goodness me, Mrs. Patterson, don't call us that! I don't know who Kedar was but his tents don't sound respectable. Aren't you ever going to like this country?"

"Not till it mends its ways and puts in some more folks and a few modern conveniences," was the decisive reply.

"I've knowed them that wouldn't be contented in the Kingdom of Heaven without they had running water and electric lights," said a slow, deep voice at Mrs. Patterson's elbow. "Now, I'm from Ioway ——"

"Good gracious, Mr. Jeff, where'd you drop from?" demanded the lady, turning quickly. "It beats all how you deef folks manage to hear everything that ain't meant for you—and nothin' that is," she continued, in an undertone.

Mr. Jeff seated himself ponderously in a cushioned chair. Age, weight and rheumatism had com-

bined to make sitting down something in the nature of a ritual in his case. Just what position Mr. Jeff occupied in the Phelps household it would have puzzled even himself to say. He was a fixture, however, owing to the fact that no other male being had ever been found who could be relied upon, year in and year out, to do the chores, drive the team to town, remain sober and not become discontented with the job. His name, long since abbreviated to Mr. Jeff, was Robert E. Lee Jefferson. He was supposed to have come, very remotely and by way of Iowa, from that glorious state which gave the original Robert E. Lee to the world. The prefix "Mr." was a concession to this illustrious fact.

In person, Mr. Jeff was bulky, bearded and pompous. He was rather deaf, but he had a way of fixing you with his big, mournful eyes which seemed to indicate that he heard quite as much of your conversation as he considered worth while. He lived in a small shack under the wing of the Company House, a privileged spot which no one but himself ever entered. "What it must look like inside is too awful to think about!" Mrs. Phelps had once said to Mrs. Patterson, to which that lady had responded promptly: "Well, it can't look any worse than he does on the outside!"

For it must be admitted that personally Mr. Jeff was not an Adonis. Modern conveniences were

nothing to him, even when they took the form of baths and barber shops. Once a year he visited one of the latter in Carrizo and indulged in a shave and a hair cut; after that Nature was allowed to do her worst. He had lived on the place since Georgia was ten and in all that time had purchased one suit of clothes, which spent most of its time in his trunk while he wore the old ones. To Mrs. Patterson, he was only another of the drawbacks in which the country abounded, although she admitted that he had his useful side.

"Are you drivin' the team over to town to-morrow?" she asked, as the chair settled under Mr. Jeff's weight.

"I thought mebbe I might," was the cautious reply.

"Then you can bring over my rooster from Rufus West's and ——"

"Wal, I reckon ——"

"And a sack of flour," continued Mrs. Patterson, without pausing for argument. "And ——" The tinkling of the telephone inside interrupted her. "I declare," she said, as Georgia ran into the house, "I can't get used to hearin' that thing out here in the wilderness. It don't seem hardly human."

"I don't see no use in 'em," said Mr. Jeff, ponderously. "What can you say into a wire that can't be wrote in a letter?"

"My stars, Mr. Jeff, ain't time anything?"

"It ain't to me. I got plenty of it. Of course, there's always them that can't wait. Evenin', Caspar!"

"Good-efening, Jefferson, and to you, Mrs. Patterson. Has not Henry the mail yet brought?"

The newcomer, a thin, sprightly little man of some sixty years, as different from Mr. Jeff as daylight from dark, seated himself on the top step. He was gray haired, tidy, blue eyed and spry; a German, and a man of some education, for his speech, though broken, seldom wandered into the local by-paths of his neighbors. He lived alone in a cabin, half a mile down the road, where he kept a neat, bachelor's house, and did assessment work on the half a dozen mining claims which he owned. A cheerful and simple-minded soul, the war had brought lines into his face and sadness into his eyes. Love of the fatherland, and loyalty to his adopted country had been strange bedfellows, and Caspar Freund had suffered more than his neighbors had given him credit for. He had weathered the storm, however, and had emerged a little puzzled, a little saddened, but still a cheery soul whom everybody liked, though nobody quite understood.

"Uncle Henry's gettin' later and later. Him and that mule must set down by the roadside and

swap yarns," declared Mrs. Patterson, pessimistically.

"Vel, ve none of us any younger gets, Mrs. Patterson," replied Caspar, with a little smile. "Neither mules nor humans. I remember ——"

"What do you think?" Georgia appeared indignantly in the doorway. "That was Susie Fuller, in the telegraph office at Carrizo. She's been trying to get me all afternoon but something was wrong with Central in Lobo ——"

"My goodness, Georgia, there's always something wrong with her. She's Hiram Mitchell's new wife and she spends most of her time carryin' Hiram's dinner to him over to his mine. What does she care if she does tie up the whole line for two hours every day!"

"Well, anyhow, Susie said she had a telegram for me from Father and it said: 'A. H. S. arrives Carrizo Thursday. Meet him.' Now, what I want to know is, who is A. H. S. and why do I meet him?"

"Is that all it said?" asked Mrs. Patterson.

"Every word."

"I reckon it's a perspective investor comin' out to look over the property."

"No, or Father would have said: 'See that he has a good time,'" said Georgia, promptly. "We always take special pains with prospective investors."

"Mebbe it's an ingeneer," ventured Mr. Jeff, who always managed to hear Georgia's clear voice except when he didn't want to. "We ain't had no ingeneers out here for quite a spell."

"Shucks, what do we want of engineers?" demanded Mrs. Patterson, sharply. "We know what we've got and how we've got to get it out. What we want is money, not engineers."

"Mebbe he iss a new school teacher for the Lobo school," volunteered Caspar. "A nice young man to teach the school would be fine for you, Georgia," he added, his eyes twinkling.

"Father wouldn't unload a strange school teacher on me without a word of warning!" said Georgia, a little faintly.

"Well, I don't know. Your father's some absent-minded and it is lonesome for you up here, Georgia, child, with all us old folks," said Mrs. Patterson, thoughtfully. "Mary'd never have given me a moment's peace if I'd tried to raise her in a place like this."

"Young iss differend from each oder," said Caspar, smiling at Georgia. "There iss dose that haf always to be mit oders, and there iss dose who by demselves can be because they use sometimes the head."

"Well, I declare——" began Mrs. Patterson, indignantly, when the discordant sound of a burro's

bray came rasping down the hillside. The effect was immediate. Georgia went into the house to open the post-office—a large table in the front parlor doing duty for this service—while both Mrs. Patterson and Mr. Freund followed her, dropping the argument by mutual consent. One could argue any time but the mail came but once a day. Mr. Jeff only showed no impatience, waiting until Uncle Henry had dismounted, thrown the mule's bridle reins over the hitching post, and mounted the steps, before he rose from his comfortable chair.

Mr. Henry Rogers was a dark, shaggy looking man with a shifty eye and a Texas accent. He was the father of a large and interesting family which he did not pretend to support on the meagre sum allowed by the Government to the rural mail carrier. He ran his family, in fact, strictly in accordance with the Scriptural injunction to take no heed for the morrow, with the result that it was well spread over the county, the active members doing what they could to pick up a living, and the lazy ones existing pleasantly on what the others picked up.

"Of co'se," Uncle Henry was wont to say, "if any feller wants to try to suppo't a family of ten on what the Gov'ment digs up fer mail carryin', let him do it. I'm not narrer minded. Fer myself, ef it keeps me and the old woman and the mule in

fodder, the rest kin git out and rustle." And gossip in Mesa, where the Rogers family dwelt, had it that they were all exceedingly good on the rustle.

"Howdy, Henery, how's your folks?" said Mr. Jeff, rising ponderously and following the carrier into the house.

"Toler'ble, thanks," was the reply, handing the mail-bag to the postmistress. "My youngest boy come out with a rash yestidday that looks considerable like smallpox, but that's all."

Mrs. Patterson edged closer to the door but the others remained calm. To the native of the Southwest smallpox is merely a disagreeable incident, and unless the victim is violently ill he seldom takes to his bed but continues his social activities unhindered by his indisposition.

"Seen any bandits down your way?" Mrs. Patterson kept her weather eye open for bandits, sure that sooner or later they would cross her path.

"Bandits? No, ma'am! What would bandits git in Mesa?" replied Uncle Henry, scornfully. "No, things is quiet enough with us. Some folks has lost chickens lately but we put that down to local activities. Yo' kain't expect to keep chickens by yo' forever, now kin you?"

A fascinated silence succeeded this remark, each hearer being perfectly aware of the speaker's family's reputation on the subject of poultry, but po-

litely willing to ignore it. During the silence, Georgia opened the big mail-bag and removed Angus' share of the contents—a letter for Mrs. Judson, one for Mrs. Patterson, one for herself, and half a dozen magazines, newspapers, and mail order catalogues. The entrance of a small boy with bare legs, carrying a book under one arm, gave the conversation another jog.

"Here, Johnny Judson, is a letter for your mother," said Georgia, handing it to him.

"Seems to be from Montgomery Ward," volunteered Uncle Henry, pleasantly. "Shouldn't wonder ef yo' Ma had worrited yo' Pa into gittin' her that washin' machine she's been after so long."

"Uh huh," grinned Johnny, embarrassed at being addressed before so large a company.

"I don't take much stock in them washin' machines," remarked Mr. Jeff, who was somewhat prejudiced by the fact that he was required to turn one every Monday.

"They are, too, good!" Johnny's voice was combative. "'Cause Joe an' me can turn it ourselves and Ma's back won't ache all the time."

"Well, my goodness, I'm sure glad to hear one male, even if it's a baby one, takin' some account of a woman's feelin's!" said Mrs. Patterson, glaring disgustedly at Mr. Jeff. "You keep on like that, Johnny Judson, and now that women's got the vote

like as not you'll be President one of these days."

"Yessam," replied Johnny, cheerfully. "Kin I borry another book?"

"In the bookcase in the hall," answered Georgia. "That boy's crazy about reading."

"I don't think as much of eddication as I uster," said Uncle Henry, pessimistically. "If I hadn't of went to school and got an eddication, like's not I'd have tumbled into somethin' worth while, instid of carryin' mail. My boy, Jim, that kain't scurcely write his name, kin make more bustin' broncs than I kin at an eddicated perfession."

"I heard that Jim was riding over in Texas Park," ventured Caspar, looking up from the El Paso *Times*. There was another silence. Texas Park and its inhabitants were not considered subjects for general conversation.

"Yes, Jim's been gentlin' some hosses fer Phil Sanders—Phil's laid up with rheumatism," replied Uncle Henry, smoothly.

"Why gentlin'?" broke in Mrs. Patterson, quickly. "I thought them greasers rode 'em rough."

"Oh, now, yo' don't want to believe everything yo' hear, Mis' Patterson. Co'se I don't go so fur as to say that there ain't been no hosses passed over the line either at Texas Park nor no other spot;

a whole lot has been goin' on in this country sence they thinned out the border patrol, but it ain't sense to accuse folks of things yo' kain't prove."

"That's so," came ponderously from Mr. Jeff. "'Tain't sense and 'tain't safe, neither."

"Safe? I'd like to know who is safe these days!" fumed the angry lady. "What with bandits, an' I. W. W.'s, an' profiteers, an' German propagandoists —oh, my land, I forgot you, Mr. Freund! I can't seem to think of you as anything but a good American!"

"I am an American citizen, Mrs. Patterson," said Caspar, his eyes twinkling again.

"Oh, are you, really, Mr. Freund?" cried Georgia. "I'm so glad! When did you take your papers out?"

"Fifteen years ago."

"Oh, then you were—oh, why did you let people say such things about you? Why didn't you tell them?"

"Vot iss the use of telling people vot they don't want to know?" responded Caspar, philosophically. "Some people here got mootch pleasure in thinking —'Old Caspar Freund iss an enemy alien—perhaps something vorse'—Vy should I their amusement spoil? I tell the Federal Inspector—let them ask him if they want to know. Now, I think I will

be walking home mit Johnny, here. Goot-efening, friends."

"Well, can you beat that?" gasped Mrs. Patterson, indignantly. "And some of us lying awake nights wonderin' where he stood! Ain't that the German of it for you?"

"I didn't wonder," said Georgia, strapping the mail-bag and handing it to Uncle Henry. Caspar Freund was one of her best friends, and she had been brought up on the simple maxim: "If he's a friend, don't doubt him."

"Wal, I'll be meanderin', myself," Mr. Rogers' voice had a hurt cadence in it. "Folks kin say what they like about Phil Sanders, but he's allus been white so fur's I know. Anyhow, I ain't takin' the say of no Germans nor female critturs on him."

"Now that that old gasbag's gone, for Heaven's sake, Georgia, open your Pa's letter and let's see if he says who A. H. S. is. I'm gettin' sort of curious, myself," remarked Mrs. Patterson, as the door closed on Uncle Henry.

"It's from Mother, and was written nearly a week ago. Father's been carrying it around in his pocket," said Georgia. The letter was brief and to the point. It ran:

DEAR GEORGIA:

I've just ten minutes to write you the latest thing your father has done. Don't blame me, for

as usual he didn't tell me till after he'd done it. Mr. Farmer took him to visit a hospital for wounded soldiers yesterday and Father was dreadfully worked up over what he saw. You know, when his feelings are aroused he's likely to do most anything if I'm not with him. There was one poor fellow that Mr. Farmer knew, who had been shell shocked and had lost an arm, and Father was so sorry for him that he invited him to go out to Angus and stay till he was well. I know just what you're thinking and I told Father so—I told him it wasn't even proper. But you know your father. He just snapped out: "I guess it's always proper for a woman to do her duty, and if you'd seen young Alec Stanley you'd have realized that he was some woman's duty, so write to George." He and Mr. Farmer had it all fixed up between them and the ticket bought before they told me anything about it. I don't know a thing in the world about the young man except that he's white and a New Yorker, but they say that shell shocked people are queer, so I want you to have Mrs. Patterson come down and stay with you and have Mr. Jeff sleep in the house. Father will telegraph you when he starts; we shall be here for a month probably. Lovingly,

MOTHER.

P. S.—Your father wants to add a postcript.

N. B.—DEAR GEORGE: Deal gently with Alexander. He's never been west of Kalamazoo and he thinks the Catskills are mountains, but he means well.—FATHER.

The three future hosts of Alexander H. Stanley gazed at one another in petrified silence, broken finally by Mrs. Patterson.

"Me come down here and stay when I've just got my chicken yard started with three hens settin' on expensive eggs, and skunks as plentiful as flowers in spring? I think your Pa's crazy!"

"At my age," pronounced Mr. Jeff, decidedly, "I ain't goin' to start sleepin' under no strange ruff. We'll rig up a signal and if he gits rambunctious, I'll come in and tackle him."

"Oh, my goodness, Mr. Jeff, a one-armed man with shell shock isn't going to get rambunctious," said Georgia, in some irritation. "It's the idea—the awful idea of having to entertain a perfectly strange New Yorker for days and days ——"

"Well, Georgia, I don't reckon he'll be much trouble. Army life don't make a young man fussy about what he eats, I guess."

"As fer entertainin'," said Mr. Jeff, in the tones of one who might be considered an authority on the subject, "your Ma ain't said he was goin' to board. Them that ain't payin' board can't look to be pampered." And he strode heavily in the direction of the barn.

"Ain't that man got a mind—in his own estimation! Well, I guess I'll be gettin' up the hill.

When did the telegram say your young man was comin'?"

"Thursday."

"Humph! Day after to-morrow. That means you'll have to go over to town to-morrow. Well, I'll come down early and help you get his room ready, and mebbe I can manage to stay nights with you, tho' the Lord knows I hate livin' in two places at once."

"Cheer up!" Georgia's voice made a desperate attempt to do so. "I suppose Father's right—it is some woman's duty and we may as well make a stab at doing it—but I won't deny that it's going to be an ordeal, unless he's a lot different from the rest of the New Yorkers I've met."

CHAPTER II

THE YOUNG MAN FROM NEW YORK

ALEXANDER HAMILTON STANLEY, born in South Carolina, raised in New York City, and late of the American Expeditionary Force in France, looked out of the car window and was unimpressed by what he saw. For the last three hours the train had been chugging its way through the desert, and the desert does not, as a rule, impress the newcomer with anything but a sense of desolation and a strong desire to go elsewhere as soon as possible. To those who love it or to those whose imagination leaps to meet the unknown, the desert brings its own joys, but Alec Stanley belonged in neither of these categories.

His disapprobation was passive, however; everything about him was passive these days. He sometimes felt as though all his energy and optimism, or, as he would have called it, his "pep," had been taken from him with the lost arm. However, it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. No one expected pep in a chap with a broken nervous system and one arm gone. All that was necessary was not

to be more of a nuisance than one had to, and to keep out of the way of the strong and well—the lucky dogs who hadn't left all that made life worth while on an operating table in France.

Life was a queer proposition no matter how you looked at it. A fellow grew up in a happy-go-lucky way. Everybody was good-natured—girls and women especially made it easy for you to loaf along and waste time. There was no hurry to settle down and dig; time enough for that later on. Then, suddenly, out of a clear sky, came an awful thing like War. It snatched you up, threw you into the whirlpool with a lot of equally dazed fellows, and you never got your bearings, or knew what you were doing till it was all over and you were pulled out and tossed into the scrap heap with the other spoiled ones. Everything was different then. No chance to make up for lost time or to begin over. You didn't feel fit enough even to think about it. But life was going on just the same and pretty soon you'd have to get back into it whether you wanted to or not.

There had been a girl, too, but that was all over. He had succeeded in making her see that; yet, illogically enough, he was hurt because she did see it. Another queer thing was that it didn't seem to matter a cuss why you had lost your arm. If you had been one of the chaps who had died, there

might have been something inspiring about it for somebody—somewhere. As it was, you knew perfectly well that you hadn't been a hero, but had simply made the best of an impossible situation and had had bad luck. Not as bad as some chaps—there were fellows that you couldn't even think about, it was too awful—but bad enough. Anyhow, nothing mattered.

This had been Alec Stanley's frame of mind when Fred Farmer had called at the hospital, bringing with him a bright-eyed, gray-haired little man whom he had introduced as the manager of the Angus Mining Company. Alec remembered vaguely that Fred Farmer was the president of a mining interest somewhere in Mexico—whether New or Old, he didn't know. They had been in the habit of chaffing Fred about it in the old days before the war. At first he had taken the little man's invitation for a joke; but the two had persisted, and Fred had made all the arrangements before Alec had really known that they were in earnest. Fred had been awfully decent about it all and had said things about the men who had stayed home helping to pay the country's debt to the men who had gone over, and in the end he had yielded.

As a matter of fact, the young man had had no other place to go on leaving the hospital except down to South Carolina to the old family place

which was owned now by a cousin. The cousin had been decent, too, but Alec knew that he had his own worries, with a wife and four youngsters, and, of course, in the South nobody who matters ever had any money. The architects' firm for which he had worked before going over had said kind things, too, but what the deuce did an architect firm want of a man with one arm?

Well, this would give him a breathing spell; a chance to shake off the dark fancies of the hospital. Not a very cheerful looking country, though, in spite of the eternal sunshine. Those mountains over to the right varied the monotony a little, but they were barren and dark; he liked green mountains if you had to have mountains, but, like a more famous man, he failed to see the necessity. Somebody, either Fred or the little gray-haired chap, had said something about a daughter—a Miss Phelps, who would meet him at Carrizo. Probably a middle-aged spinster. At least, he hoped so. He liked middle-aged women—you got on with them so easily. In his present state of mind and body, a girl would be ghastly.

"Dis, suh, am de enterprisin' an' flourishin' town of Carrizo." The soft tones of the Pullman darky broke into Alec's meditation.

"What!" He jumped nervously. "Where?" he demanded, glancing out of the window. The

train was certainly slowing down but there seemed to be no town in sight. The porter grinned.

"Jes' ahaid, suh. We stops up yere by de water tank." He picked up Alec's overcoat and suitcase and gave him a friendly lift as the train stopped with a jerk. "You all ain' got use to bein' without dat ahm yit, Cap'en," he added. To Alec, who hated pity, there was something warm and cheering in the man's tones. If you had to be molly-coddled there was no one who could do it quite as comfortably as a good nigger, he would have said.

"Thanks, boy, I'm sort of wobbly all over, I guess."

"Jes' outen de hospital? Wal, dis yere's de place fer sick folks, so dey say, an' I reckon dey's correc' fo' I nevah could see nuffin' in it fer a well man." And the chuckling porter deposited man, overcoat and suitcase in the road as the train pulled out.

Pulled out and left him, it seemed to Alec, in the middle of the wilderness. He looked down the track. A green and yellow building, evidently the depot, stood there, also a smaller one, a telegraph station, similarly painted. In the distance he saw other buildings, some of them adobe shacks; others, the store, the bank and the schoolhouse, rather more pretentious. There were no sidewalks;

sand everywhere, and a hot, busy wind which whirled it up in little spirals and blew it in your eyes.

All this he saw, for there was nothing to do but stand and look about him. A few men in shirt sleeves stood around the station, but no one came his way. He was evidently the only passenger mad enough to disembark at Carrizo. Alec felt a childish sense of being lost. For two years he had been under orders; fed, clothed, transported, doctored and nursed. Now the whole fabric of officialdom had faded away and he was thrown suddenly on his own resources in a strange land. With a sigh he leaned over, arranged the overcoat so that he could pick it and the suitcase up with one hand, and was about to start toward the station when down the track came a young girl. A very young girl, she seemed to Alec, who had his eye "peeled" for elderly spinsters. A girl with yellow hair and blue eyes, wearing a broad-brimmed and quite old-fashioned straw hat, and a blue gingham dress short enough to show a pair of stubby little feet in country shoes.

"Oh!" she cried. "I'm so sorry! I meant to be right on time, but the harness broke in a dreadfully vital spot and we just had to poke the last mile. Oh, by the way, I suppose you are Mr. Stanley, aren't you?"

"I sure am," replied Alec, almost cheerfully. "But don't tell me you're Miss Phelps!"

"But I am, you know—Georgia Phelps."

"I got the idea, I don't know how," floundered Alec, clumsily, "that you were—well—a lot older, and motherly, sort of."

"Gracious, is that the way Mr. Frederick Farmer talks about me? But can't I ——" She paused in some embarrassment. She had been about to offer to take the suitcase and the overcoat—a dreadfully tactless thing to do, of course.

"Thanks, the one that's left is all right." He tried to believe that he didn't mind being pitied by this pleasant young thing, but he did—extremely.

"Of course! Well, come along over to the livery stable; Mr. Jeff is waiting for us there, and if we don't go after him he'll never pry himself loose."

"Mr. Jeff?"

"My chaperon, or boss, or man of all work—anything you like to call him. There's nothing like him in the world, so I won't try to classify him."

"Oh!" Alec was beginning to wonder what sort of a civilization he had encountered where girls looked sixteen, talked twenty-six, and managed perfect strangers as though they had been born to the job.

They plodded along in silence for a few minutes. It was hot—very hot; and the sandy ground made

hard walking. There was something peculiar about the air, too. One's breath came in short gasps and didn't seem to do much good when it came. Alec stopped a moment and set the suitcase down. In a second Georgia had seized it.

"Now, don't say anything. I'm going to carry it. I'm as strong as a burro and I always carry visitors' bags when the altitude gets hold of them."

"I do feel rather queer," Alec stammered. "I suppose it is the altitude."

"Of course. Here we are—that's my team. We have to drive four horses because it's such a hard pull over the Divide. Mr. Jeff, this is Mr. Stanley. I think we'll start right away if you're not too tired?" to Alec. "Carrizo is so hot and dusty I always like to turn my back on it."

Alec replied that he was not too tired and Mr. Jeff fixed a melancholy eye on him.

"Glad to know you, young feller," he said, slowly. "I would have went over myself if I hadn't been so heavy. They's a prejudice in the army aginst fat men."

Another embarrassing moment occurred when it developed that it takes two arms to get an invalid into a wagon; but this having been tactfully accomplished, Georgia leaned back in her seat and took a good look at her guest. She could do it unobserved because Snap, one of the lead horses, always felt it

an absolute necessity to rear and paw the air furiously for the first few seconds of any trip. Snap was a riding horse and he liked to keep up the fiction that being driven was galling to his pride. Being an artist who worked for art's sake, his performance was usually realistic enough to hold the attention of anyone riding behind him for the first time.

Georgia saw a young man who looked to be about twenty-two or three, but who was probably three or four years older. "A few inches taller than I am," she said to herself, " but awfully thin—I could lick him in a fight. Nice, dark brown hair with a permanent wave in it; come-hithery eyes, and a dandy smile. He'll hate me if I ask questions, but one of these days I'm going to know just how he lost that arm. That's what got my impressionable parent, and no wonder—it makes me feel lumpy around the throat myself."

" Sort of circus horse you've got there, isn't he? " remarked the visitor, leaning toward Mr. Jeff, and eyeing Snap with some disfavor.

" No, jest plain goosefool," replied Mr. Jeff. " Has to do jest so much showin' off before them town hosses before he kin settle down to business. I've knowed folks like that an' they always come to a bad end," he finished.

" Is it far to your mine? "

"Not so very," replied Georgia, cheerfully. "It takes us most five hours to make it because it's uphill practically all the way till we get to the top of the Divide. We came over yesterday and stayed all night in Carrizo."

Five hours in a mountain wagon on a country road and in that sun! Alec hadn't realized that there were still in America places where people traveled in wagons. Well, if the girl could stand it he supposed he could, but if he ever met Fred Farmer again, let him look out!

"Of course," continued the girl, "everybody doesn't drive. Lots of people have automobiles; but we're poor folks until the mine pans out. I don't mind because I love horses. I think the best machine that was ever made is tame compared to a good horse," and she looked across the country to where, on a parallel road, two horsemen were traveling. One of the horses was giving his rider ample chance to display his horsemanship.

"Nothing tame about that fellow," Alec grinned.

"That there chap is Jim Rogers, and the hoss he's ridin' comes plumb near bein' a outlaw," pronounced Mr. Jeff, whose vision was better than his hearing.

"That's the bay mare that belongs to Phil Sanders, Mr. Jeff, and she's no more outlaw than I am," protested Georgia, indignantly. "If Jim brings

her to the barbecue next week I'm going to ride her."

"You better keep off Phil Sanders' hosses; they're nigh as crooked as he is. Neither of 'em is fitten company fer gals."

"Shucks! I'll bet you a box of tobacco to one of cartridges that I can stay on that mare ten minutes."

"Ten minutes on a sidewinder like that is some time, and I ain't a bettin' man," replied Mr. Jeff, cautiously. "But if I see you tryin' to ride that hoss I'll telegraph your Pa to once."

"What is a barbecue?" asked Alec, with a view to averting further hostilities.

"Oh, I suppose back East you'd call it a picnic. It's one of those things that everybody comes to, and brings things to eat and drink, and they barbecue a steer and we dance and have races and all that sort of thing. Everybody camps out over night. If you're feeling fit we'll drive over."

"Oh, I'll pick up, now that I'm out of the hospital. A fellow gets awfully blue in those places. It's hard to realize that there are healthy people outside, living the way you used to live, or that you'll ever get your place back among them."

"Now, look here, Mr. Stanley"—Georgia's voice was determined, "just try to remember this —that you're going to get that place back, or a

better one. We didn't go over to fight Germans—Father and Mother and Mr. Farmer and I—but we can appreciate somebody else who did, and we can stand by him to the finish when we get a chance."

"Thank you." Alec spoke slowly. "That means something. The thing the down-and-outs have to fight is the feeling that they've been thrown away because they're no good—like an old suit of clothes."

"It looks that way in the hospital. It won't out here!"

Alec smiled. He liked this girl. Talking to her was a good deal like talking to one's buddy. But, of course, it was nonsense to talk about his finding a place in this forsaken land. He looked about him with a distaste that he hoped his eyes did not reveal. Glare and sand, broken here and there by mesquite and sagebush; the dark-looking mountains as far away as ever, though they had been driving nearly an hour. It seemed impossible that sane men could elect to live in such a country, yet this girl lived here and she was neither queer nor crude. He wondered if she were an unusual specimen of Western girl or were they all like that—with firm chins, healthy looking chests and funny little feet?

He remembered that the last time he had noticed

girls back East, before they had stopped being girls and had become nurses, canteen workers and ambulance drivers, they hadn't looked like this one. They had all been very slender and stoopy, with long, pointed feet, baby faces and hair arranged in funny little wads over their ears. Maybe the styles had changed during the war, or perhaps New Mexico had a style of its own. He had never thought much about Western girls; occasionally one met the well-to-do ones in society and they were just about like the Eastern girls if you didn't listen to their voices. Then, of course, there was the dashing cowgirl of fiction and the films. She wore a Stetson, usually, and bristled with automatics. One enjoyed seeing her but didn't yearn for a closer acquaintance.

This girl, however, was human, she was nice, she had a pleasant voice and an easy, comfortable way which Alec knew only belonged to girls who were sure of themselves socially. He had supposed from his limited knowledge of the world that this sureness only came when there had been money or social position in the family for two or three generations. Its lack usually marked the nouveaux riches or the wistful poor. Well, it would be an interesting experience, no doubt, but a couple of weeks would be enough of it. Get some fresh air in his lungs and a chance to sleep in something that

wasn't a hospital cot and then back to Cousin Ben for further recuperation and advice.

"Don't forget to stop at Rufus West's, Mr. Jeff."

"At Rufus West's? What fur?" Mr. Jeff's voice intimated that for him society had no lure.

"To get Mrs. Patterson's rooster," patiently. "You know she asked you to."

"Did she so?" meditatively. "Wal, I ain't much at hearin' and I'm durned poor at heedin', these days."

"He never said a truer word," Georgia whispered to Alec. "You never know whether he hears you or not. He looks solemn and if it's something he doesn't want to do he pretends he didn't hear."

"It sounds like a good idea if you can put it over."

"He's been putting it over for ten mad, happy years. He's nearly driven Mother and me wild sometimes, but I don't believe we could get along without him. He's part of us—like the mine and all the rest of it."

"You've always lived here?"

"Since I was five; and never away except for four years of school in Chicago."

Chicago! The soul of the New Yorker froze within him. A lifetime of this and four years of Chicago! Well, one reads sometimes of roses that

bloomed in slums and, as the wise man had it, you never could tell.

"I'll get down and get him, Mr. Jeff," the girl was saying; they had stopped before a small adobe house, set rather pleasantly among an unusual number of trees for that part of the country, Rufus West, thanks to the blessings of irrigation, being an experimenter in peaches and apples. "Oh, there's Mrs. West—she's bringing him out."

There was no need to explain what Mrs. West was bringing out; the victim was making loud and violent complaints, although securely crated and prepared for the vicissitudes of travel.

"I reckon he'll quiet down some when he gets used to travelin'," said the lady, when introductions had been made and the crate lodged securely at Mr. Jeff's feet. "I hope Mis' Patterson will enjoy him more than we have. He's a perfect brute, fights anything that goes on legs."

"Well, excitement is what she wants," laughed Georgia. "She's bored to death up at the mill."

"She won't be bored with Pancho Villa on the place. We call him that because he's so sort of unexpected, hops on a rooster and has him laid out before you know he's even thinkin' of it. Well, glad to have met you, Mr. Stanley; hope you get fat and hearty up at Angus."

Gradually the road ascended, rounding little

curves and coming out each time a little nearer the mountains, which began to take on warmer colorings. The country, too, began to change, became rougher as they swung into the foot-hills, the sagebush and dwarfed mesquite changing to juniper and pine. Several times they crossed the same little stream which wound its way from the Indian Reservation up in the mountains; crossed it usually without the formality of a bridge, the old wagon crashing down into the stony river bed and groaning slowly out on the other bank.

The mountains were growing green and brown instead of purple. One could trace fascinating little trails that ran up and around their sides. One no longer thought of the sandy desert where Carrizo rested. Now and then, at the top of a rise, Georgia would touch Alec on the shoulder with a "Look back," or "Look over there," and he would see valleys—canyons, she called them—fertile and pleasant-looking places where red and white range cattle roamed peacefully about, adding the necessary touch of life to the picture.

It was afternoon when they began to climb the final ascent to the Divide. The trees were all pines now, and grew high and beautiful. The country was very wild and lovely, with only a cabin here and there, or a hole in the side of a mountain to indicate the prospector and his work. The air

was cooler, more invigorating, and full of the smell of pines. The mountains were now so near that one seemed in their very midst. The four horses toiled perseveringly up the steep incline; so steep that the road had to zigzag to facilitate the ascent.

At last the top was reached and the weary horses stopped of their own accord to rest. Georgia turned to Alec triumphantly.

"Now look!" she said. "Look back first."

Alec turned obediently. There was a moment's silence, then he spoke. "Gosh!" he exclaimed in an awed tone.

"I knew," said Georgia, later, to Mrs. Patterson, "that he'd never have the nerve to say 'Catskills' to me!"

The Divide, on the crest of which they were perched, very precariously, it seemed to the visitor, looked over an expanse of land as broad and as billowy as an ocean. Miles and miles of rolling country, gaunt and brown, but brightened here and there where a graceful growth of green marked the winding of a river or a group of foot-hills covered with pines broke the severity of the line, or a ranch house surrounded by an orchard showed the hand of man and the power of irrigation.

"Back there is Carrizo, on the railroad," said the girl, "and those few little houses to the right, this way, are in Lobo—a dreadful little town with

nothing in it but a post-office. Those mountains that you see are two hundred miles away. Now look this way."

The view on the other side was so glorious that Alec understood why she had kept it until the last. Below them was an almost sheer drop of a thousand feet, the descent being made possible by a zigzag road cut in the side of the mountain. Half-way down, in a pocket of the mountains, was the Angus Mining Company's plant, surrounded by offices and cabins. At the foot of the Divide, in another pocket, lay the Company House, with its barn, corral, etc., while further on rose the mountains again—the glorious, mysterious mountains, stretching down into Old Mexico.

"To the left, down there, is Mesa. You can't see it—isn't anything to see. Those further mountains, way off there, are in Old Mexico—just across the border. In those foot-hills lies Texas Park."

"Texas Park? Sounds interesting."

"It is interesting. Some people think that the ranchers who live there know more than they should about Villa, and Renterias, and some of their friends. Of course, nobody knows; that's what makes it interesting."

"But the border patrol? Doesn't that operate here, on the border?" said Alec, open-eyed.

"Oh, I guess so, when there's anything to operate

on; but you can't arrest people just because the neighbors think they are queer, and that's all there's ever been against Texas Park. Mr. Jeff, here, will tell you perfectly thrilling stories of the cases of rifles that have been seen going into Texas Park and never coming out, and any young man who goes with the Texas Park crowd gets the name of being 'wild.' It's like the 'Doones,'—we're afraid of them but we'd miss them awfully if they were to go away."

There were moments during the descent when Alec frankly held his breath and was thankful that the girl didn't look in his direction. Moments when the two leaders seemed to be stepping directly out into space, while the hunched-up position of the wheel-horses showed plainly their appreciation of the dangers of the transaction. It was with decided relief that he found himself arrived before the Company House from which an elderly woman came out to meet them.

"Wal, I was beginnin' to think you weren't comin'," she said, cordially. "This is Mr. Stanley, I suppose? I'm Mrs. Patterson, and proud to know you. You're the first returned soldier we've seen round these parts except for one or two roustabouts that the Lord knows were no treat goin' over or returnin'. Wal, you did fetch the rooster, didn't you? What say, Mr. Jeff?"

"I said you was goin' to have your hands full with that bird, Mrs. Patterson. I'm goin' to uncrate him and lock him in the barn for the night before he gits to pickin' on our roosters."

"Wal, I'll git in and drive over to the barn and help you," retorted the lady. "If you're afraid of him he'll sense it and take a chunk out of you."

"Huh?" said Mr. Jeff, wrathfully.

"Oh, I said I'd go over and help you," snapped Mrs. Patterson, hopping into the wagon.

Georgia took the suitcase and handed Alec the overcoat.

"Welcome to the town of Angus!" she said, running up the walk. "Consider that I have handed you the keys to the city."

"Thank you," answered Alec, rallying his weary spirits. "Consider them graciously accepted. Lead on."

CHAPTER III

VICTORIA

ALEC stretched himself and glanced at his watch. It was nine o'clock. He had been told to sleep late, and he wondered just exactly what hour would be considered late in this most unconventional household. Unconventional was putting the case mildly, he felt, as he remembered his supper of the night before; a very good one, served by lamplight and eaten in company with an exceedingly pretty girl, an elderly woman with a sharp tongue, and an old chap who stared at one with the awful fixity of a sphinx and who came to the table directly from the cow-shed, bringing with him a large share of that aroma which, while healthy, is not exactly the sort of thing one craves with one's meals.

These three people, no one of whom bore any mental or social resemblance to the other, lived, apparently, on a plane of perfect equality and furnished a table conversation remarkable for its directness and its comprehensiveness. During the meal they had worked their way, Alec figured with

a grin, through the subjects of the war, the armistice, the league of nations, the administration's Mexican policy, suffrage, the price of beef on the hoof, a recent hog epidemic, and the scarcity of sugar. Evidently these people read the newspapers and kept up with the problems of the day; but what a situation for a girl! Alec, whose father had been a South Carolinian, and whose mother had come of a conservative old New York family, wondered what her parents were thinking of.

Suddenly the memory of a night in New York came to him; a night not long before his enlistment in the army, when he with a crowd of young people had attended a dinner and theatre party given by a young married couple of their set. After the theatre they had done the cabarets and the night clubs, the party breaking up in the small hours. He recalled the girls, young, all of them; their gowns, their dancing, the very evident sophistication of even the youngest ones, and concluded that the emancipation of woman had indeed arrived, and that she was availing herself of it according to her lights. To the swagger ones belonged the cabarets and the midnight dances, to the serious minded, hospital nursing and ambulance driving, to the business-like, the handling of anything that came their way from politics to ranches in rural New Mexico. The time to criticize or to analyze Woman

was past, Alec reflected, with the rather uncanny clear-mindedness that sometimes accompanies one's waking hour. It was now Man's only privilege to stand aside and watch her fearful activities.

The little room to which he awoke was rather bare, but very neat and pleasant. The furniture was cheap but comfortable, the little table with the lamp on it held a few books, and the wall was decorated with pictures cut from magazines, with here and there a gay calendar or Christmas card. A small drum stove stood in a corner, and near it a wood-box with logs and pine cones. One window opened upon the canyon with old Nogal Mountain in the distance, while the other commanded a view of the barn and corral across the road. While dressing,—a tedious and irritating piece of work these days,—he saw his hostess, mounted on a demure looking pony, trot up the canyon and foil the attempts of several inquisitive range cattle to poke themselves through a hole in the fence which enclosed the pasture.

"I like that girl," he told himself, as he struggled with his puttees. "But, Lord, I've been penned up with wrecks so long that any healthy kid would look good to me, I suppose!"

Down-stairs, breakfast for one was laid in the dining-room, and Mrs. Patterson appeared in the doorway with the coffee-pot in her hand.

"Morning, lieutenant, sleep well?" she asked, cheerily.

"Bully, thanks," replied the invalid, addressing himself with interest to the breakfast. Mrs. Patterson eyed him with a maternal eye and forbore to ask questions until the ravages of appetite had been somewhat repaired.

"By the way," she asked finally, "which are you, lieutenant or captain?"

"Neither. Just plain buck private," replied Alec, with a grin.

"Oh!" Mrs. Patterson covered her disappointment nobly. "Well, that's what Georgia said, but I thought mebbe—my land, what's that racket?" Sounds of altercation and the shrill voices of hens smote the listening ear. "Merciful powers, that rooster of mine has got loose and is killin' and slayin'!" And Mrs. Patterson, followed by Alec, rushed out-of-doors.

A scene of terror met their eyes. In the road, just outside the fence, surrounded by a crowd of intensely interested hens, two roosters, one red and one gray, were making fierce and bloody passes at each other, and, alas for home talent, the gray seemed to be the bloodiest!

"I knew it! I darsen't touch him—he'd pick my eyes out! Get the rake from the barn—no, you can't—you keep watch on 'em whilst I get it."

And the lady picked up her skirts and ran to the barn. A few of the hens followed, scenting a meal, but the rest, true to feminine instinct, remained to shriek their protests at the violence of which they were the cause.

"So they're at it, air they? Wal, I sorter expected they'd mix if they got the chanst." Alec turned to see Mr. Jeff's heavy features fixed gloomily upon the combatants. "Looks like our Jim was gittin' the wust of it."

"Not much he isn't! He's a snappy little fighter —he'll get his second wind in a minute,—watch him!" Alec spoke with vim.

"Wal, I don't reckon a little excitement is goin' to hurt us none, man or beast," replied Mr. Jeff, almost cheerfully. "Go after him, boy!"

"I'll say he's some rooster!" cried Alec, enthusiastically. "I'll bet you ——"

"Wait, the stranger's got him—that was a bad one!"

"Not by a damn sight he hasn't. All he wants is a bit of reviving!" And Alec seized the wobbly Jim and, running to the horse-trough, dipped him into it.

"Pretty good work for a chap with one ——" Mr. Jeff stopped suddenly. There was a sound of an approaching rush; something whirled itself out of a cloud of dust and landed in front of them.

Georgia had swung herself off the pony and was facing them, red-faced and indignant.

"Oh," she cried, "you miserable savages! Why didn't you stop them? Don't you see my rooster's nearly dead,—what do you want to drown him for? Drop him this minute!" Then as the shamefaced Alec obeyed, "Oh, look at the blood on him!"

"Wal, it ain't all his'n," responded Mr. Jeff; "he was comin' in under the wire when you come along and spoiled the fight. Anyhow, Rufus West can't say he's got a rooster that can lick everything in the county no more."

Georgia, scorning to answer, bore the struggling warrior into the chicken-house and bolted the door. Mrs. Patterson, who had appeared carrying a pitchfork, dropped it and assisted Mr. Jeff in corraling the strange rooster and taking him back to the barn. Georgia walked back to the house, followed by Alec, who was apologizing with much fervor.

"I will forgive *you*," the girl said rather stiffly, "because you've been in the midst of battle, murder and sudden death so long that you're probably demoralized; but that wretched old Mr. Jeff ought to know better. I know he let that brute out and planned that fight! I suppose I ought to be thankful that he didn't put spurs on them."

"If he had, Mrs. Patterson would have been out a rooster," suggested Alec, meekly.

"Do you really——" Georgia's eyes twinkled and her dimples came out suddenly. "Do you mean that my rooster was beating?"

"He was beginning to show signs of it, if you'd kept away till I helped him get his wind."

"I'm ashamed of both of us," confided Georgia, dimpling again. "It's not that I'm proud of a fighting rooster; don't you think it! It's because their lives are so hard when the hens have all seen them whipped. I had a rooster once who got dreadfully beaten right before the hens and the miserable things never let him forget it. They snubbed him to his dying day and he had to play around with the chickens, like an old bachelor with the débutantes. Now come over here to this end of the porch and let me show you Sunset Park and we'll put away the thoughts of blood."

She perched herself comfortably on the railing of the veranda and pointed out the points of interest to the guest, who, stretched pleasantly out in a steamer chair with lighted cigarette, began to think that perhaps, after all, there might be worse places to recuperate in than Angus, N. M. He was looking better already, Georgia told herself; though perhaps the easy-going army shirt and khaki riding trousers had something to do with it. She wondered, with a throb of pity, how he had managed the awkward puttees. The sight of the empty

sleeve pinned across the chest was a cruel reminder of the hundreds of hapless youngsters who had given their best, and who must be saved from despair and despondency. Georgia's blue eyes were gazing innocently at Sunset Park, the glories of which she was extolling, but her mind, for women are creatures who can think and talk independently, was running along after this fashion:

"I like that coppery color of hair—not red, but dark brown with glints in it—nice eyes, too, but I'll bet he's a scandalous flirt. I hope he won't flirt with me; I've been vegetating in the wilderness so long that anything that doesn't look like Uncle Henry Rogers or Mr. Jeff is liable to go to my head like a cocktail."

What she said, after Sunset Park had been exhausted, was: "Have you known Mr. Farmer long?"

"Six or seven years, I guess. We used to go around in the same crowd before I went into the army. Fred's eight or nine years older than I am."

"Oh?" invitingly.

"I'm twenty-six," with the willingness of the male to tell its age to anyone who will listen.

"You are? I would have guessed twenty-one."

"Most people do. Don't know why unless it's because I look green and gullible."

"Humph—no, not that. But you don't seem like a New Yorker to me, somehow."

"I'm not a New Yorker. I was born in Charleston, S. C., and lived there till I was fifteen. My mother was a New Yorker and we went back there when my father died."

"Well, the Charleston accounts for it. There's a sort of humanness about you that isn't like New York."

"Isn't that rather sweeping when you admit you've never been there?"

"I haven't needed to go there,—it's come out here. Most of the people who are interested in this company are New Yorkers, and they're always in a hurry and always thinking about how much money they are making."

"Well, that endearing trait isn't confined to New York," said the young man, meditatively. "Since I've seen a different kind of life I've sometimes thought that we Americans are all a bit that way, always in a hurry, even in our pleasures."

"Not all of us; just a few of you in the East."

"Well, I'm not going to quarrel with you after all the excitement we've had this morning. Excitement is bad for my nerves. But I do think we could take things a bit easier. Why, even the women, the girls that I used to know, work as hard

trying to have a good time as their fathers do trying to pay for it."

"Why do you say the girls you used to know?"

"Because that sort of thing is all over for me. This," touching the empty sleeve, "has upset my apple cart."

"You mean that you can't do the things you used to do? But what's that got to do with your friends?"

"A whole lot. You see, I'm an architect. Did you ever hear of a one-armed architect?"

"It's hard, cruel, but still I don't see what it has to do with your friends ——"

"Yes, you do, you're bound to see. Oh, a lot of it's my own fault! I've drifted along—had a good education—and a bit of money, not enough to live on but enough to help out a small salary ——"

"You were lucky ——"

"I'd have been luckier if I'd had the sense to see it that way and work harder."

"What made you see it, finally? The war?"

"No. A girl."

"Oh!" outwardly. Inwardly: "Might have known it with those eyes!"

"When I met her I began kicking myself because I hadn't earned something to offer her." Alec spoke quietly, rather as though he was talking to himself. This girl made one feel that way,—com-

fortable and confidential. "You see, her father's got a lot of money. He's one of the human money-making machines,—turns it out like a gold mine ——"

"Gold mines don't always, unfortunately," wistfully.

"That's where they differ from Ephraim H. Dunlap—he does."

"Ephraim Dunlap! Not ——"

"The Ephraim. Do you know him?"

"No, but he owns stock in the mine. He's never been out here."

"Oh, he owns a piece of everything that's worth owning. Victoria, that's his daughter, is a sort of princess. She only has to say 'I want it,' and Ephraim hustles it around to the front door for her. She's not my kind at all."

"But how did you happen to care for each other?"

"Oh, things like that happen easily enough! A young fellow, in a good position, and especially if he comes of the right sort of people, can go almost anywhere. Women are nice to him if he behaves himself, and the men don't stop to ask whether he has money or not, till he wants to marry one of their daughters."

"Then Ephraim did ask?"

"No, he didn't, because I didn't want to marry

Victoria; that is, I didn't want to till I'd made good and had something to offer a girl. I wanted her, not her money. I like money as well as any one but I can't see myself taking it from a woman. So we went along, trying to pretend we weren't engaged, and with the old gentleman keeping one eye on us and the other on the burglar alarm, so to speak, when the war came and I went over. Well, the rest you can see for yourself."

"Don't tell me she threw you over!"

"Of course she didn't. Victoria's a thoroughbred. She stuck to me, and what's more, she made her father stick. They're awfully decent people, and a wounded soldier has a claim on decent people. No, they stuck, but I wouldn't have it."

"Oh! But——"

"Wait a minute! Do you think a man wants to be married for pity? Her people didn't want me in the family when I was sound and had prospects; do you think they'd want me when I'm out of the race? Any fool can see that."

"Thanks. But she——"

"Same thing, only she doesn't know it. She's sorry for me. A man knows those things when he cares for a woman."

"You seem to know a good deal about women for one of your age."

"No, I don't, but it's common sense. What is

there about any man to make a woman willing to give up everything for him, anyhow?"

"I never could see, myself," smiled Georgia, "but it's being done an awful lot."

"Well, no woman is going to do it for me if I can help it. That's why—but I don't know why I'm boring you with all this. A fellow gets to be awfully self-centred somehow when he's been sick."

"Any girl is interested in a love affair, even if she isn't in it," replied Georgia. "Only it makes me tired to hear about people who deliberately spoil their own lives! I think it's contemptible!"

"So do I. That's why I wouldn't let Victoria do it and why I told her to stop coming to the hospital to see me."

"Well, if you told her that," remarked the girl, hopping down from the railing, "I guess Victoria was justified in breaking the engagement. I never heard of such nonsense."

"That's what she said," said Alec, soberly.

"Georgia! I want to speak to you a minute," Mrs. Patterson's voice came from within. Georgia ran into the house. "Do you know," continued the good lady, as the girl entered, "I've been thinkin'. What's the use of my stayin' down here jest to chaperon you and that boy? Neither of you needs me and my chickens do. D'you reckon your Ma would be mad if I didn't stay?"

Georgia laughed. "No, I don't," she said, "but I think he would. I think he'd be awfully scandalized. But you needn't stay if you don't want to. I told you that before he came."

"Well, before he came I couldn't judge. There are returned soldiers and returned soldiers. But, land, I'd trust this one in a young lady's seminary!"

"Why? I like him, myself."

"Mercy, yes, so do I. I don't mean that he's sissy; but he's decent. He wouldn't do nothin' he shouldn't without he was urged, and that's as much as you can say of the best of us, I reckon."

"Well, he won't be urged around here, but I really don't think he'd be comfortable without you," said Georgia, decidedly.

"I sometimes think when young folks are decent it's throwin' temptation in their path to be everlastingly watchin' them, but how are you going to tell that they're decent until they've been tried? It's an awful problem. And if I've got to tramp up that hill night and mornin' to feed them chickens, I won't be much use even as a watcher."

"Well, I'll walk up this morning with you and help you carry that man-eating tiger of yours, and after that we'll all take turns going up. There's Mr. Freund coming up the road; I'll go out and see

what he wants; you can come along when you're ready."

Georgia paused a moment by the steamer chair as she returned to the porch.

"Mr. Stanley," she said, "are you one of those people who believe that there's no good German but a dead German?"

"No," was the rather surprised reply. Apparently people in this part of the country jumped easily from one subject to another. "None of the boys who fought the Fritzes believe that; though, of course," with a smile, "we rather prefer 'em dead."

"But you've all met some of them who made you believe that the whole German people isn't rotten. Is that it?"

"Yes, something of the sort, but why?"

"Because a friend of mine, a German, is coming up the road right now, and he'll probably come in. I want you to like him."

"That funny little chap who's talking to Mr. Jeff at the gate of the corral?"

"Yes. His name is Caspar Freund and I've known him ever since I was a youngster. Everyone's always liked Caspar, until the war. Then a lot of people suddenly remembered that he was a German and made up their minds that he must be a spy. Nobody knew whether he was an American

citizen or not, and Caspar kept them guessing. The other day he told me that he'd taken out his papers years ago. I've watched him grow old just during the war. It's hurt him horribly. Why, only think what it would mean to you and me to see our country do the awful things he's had to see his Fatherland do!"

"It would be tough," acknowledged Alec.

"Tough? It would be ghastly! At first, he wouldn't believe it. He used to talk to me with tears in his eyes about England's starting the war, and all that nonsense. Then, when he couldn't help believing, he just seemed to break inside. He wouldn't talk and he seemed to age years. Somehow, I've had a lot more respect for him than for some of those Germans who have been pawing the ground and talking about how they hate Germany and love us, and all the rest of it. I don't believe you can hate your country all at once, no matter what it does; any more than you could hate your father if he suddenly went wrong and did something you were ashamed of."

"I know; I've sometimes thought of it that way."

"You're probably the first returned soldier that Caspar has met, so be easy with him if you can. I'll introduce you and then I'll have to go up the hill with Mrs. Patterson," finished the girl as Caspar came up the path.

CHAPTER IV

THE AIR PATROL

ABOUT a week had passed since Alec Stanley's initiation to life at Angus, when Mrs. Patterson and Georgia arrived at the mill one morning to feed the former's chickens, a twice daily task now that the elder lady was spending her nights at the Company House.

"I declare, there's something about that hill besides altitude. I never see a hill that got you so," declared Mrs. Patterson, vindictively. "By the way, did you think you heard an aeroplane this morning?"

"No; did you?"

"Yes, and the Stanley youngster woke up and thought he'd dreamed it. I reckon it was an air patrol."

"Maybe, but they don't often come down here; it's not their beat."

"I know that, but, Georgia, I sometimes wonder if we're as safe up here as we think we are?"

"From the air patrol?"

"No, of course not; from bandits. I wouldn't be one bit surprised, Georgia Phelps, if Pancho Villa and his band should walk in on us some fine night."

Georgia burst out laughing. "Oh, Mrs. Patterson," she said, "the only Pancho Villa you'll ever see around here is the one you've got in your chicken yard. What in the world would bandits get in Angus to pay them for the trip? Or do you think they're doing banditing for their health?"

"I didn't say Angus. What's the matter with Carrizo? There's a bank there and old Houseman's store and ——"

"But it's on the railroad! They wouldn't dare."

"Shucks! Didn't they haul those American soldiers right off the train down near Brownsville? Well, I've got Jim's gun loaded and I intend to sell my life dear!"

"Good gracious, Mrs. Patterson, you make my flesh creep! Do you suppose my father would leave me alone if there was the least bit of danger?"

"Your father's a nice man, Georgia, but he voted the Democratic ticket, which shows that you can't be sure of him in a crisis."

"But where would the bandits cross the line, with all the soldiers they've got on the border?"

"Georgia Phelps, sometimes I think you ain't got the sense of a ten-year-old! Suppose you

wanted to go over into Mexico, on the quiet, where would you cross?"

Georgia's breath came a little quickly. "Through Mocking Bird Gap," she said, softly.

"Jest exactly. Down by the Carlos Baca ranch, where we used to go camping, eh?"

Georgia nodded.

"Well, you mark my words, child, that's the way they'll come one of these days. That country's so dry in spots that they can't patrol it like they should. There's nothing but gypsum water some places and half the horses won't touch it, and the trails further down are awful. Jim was two days gettin' through that place once, and what show would soldiers stand?"

"Mercy, Mrs. Patterson, let's talk about something else! I'm not scared and I know we won't have any trouble, but—oh, look, your last setting of eggs is hatching!"

Georgia turned her back on the tiny cabin a little later and started for home.

"She really is scared about those bandits of hers, and it's just as well for her not to be up here alone with her fears at night," she said to herself. "I believe," she called back to Mrs. Patterson, who stood in the doorway of her cabin, "that I'll go back by Juniper Canyon and see if there are any more breaks in the fence."

"You'd better not go wandering round on foot," was the reply. "Some of them range cattle will get you one of these days."

"Not while I'm thin enough to roll under a fence," laughed the girl. "I wonder if they really did hear an airship?" she continued to herself, as people do who live much alone. "If Mrs. Patterson hadn't thought she heard it I'd have said it was that boy's imagination. He's awfully jumpy. I suppose it's the remains of the shell shock, and the broken up love affair. Seems such a pity he's in love; there's something so sort of dampening about a nice-looking young man like that who's in love with somebody else. Not that one wants him exactly, only it makes everything so sort of settled and cut and dried—takes the romance out of it. I'm sorry for him, too. That Victoria girl can't have much pluck. I'd like to see anybody make me give up anybody I really wanted—goodness!" She stopped suddenly as she realized that she was not alone.

A strange man stood in the pasture just inside the fence, looking at her. You, who live in cities and see strangers all the time, can hardly realize what a shock a stranger can be when you meet him in a lonely canyon where you've never met anyone. For a moment Mrs. Patterson's chatter about bandits came into Georgia's head, but only for a mo-

PROPERTY
OF THE
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ment. The stranger was no Mexican, despite his browned skin. Furthermore, the object which loomed up behind him betrayed his identity. It was an army plane, resting as gracefully on the flat surface of the pasture as though about to spread its wings and fly away at the slightest provocation.

"You don't strike me," remarked the man, casually, "as the sort of person who would be easily scared into giving up anything you had your grip on," and he grinned good-naturedly at her startled look.

Georgia drew her breath sharply. "Who are you, please?" she demanded. "And what are you and that thing doing in my pasture?"

"She's resting and having her little insides tinkered with," jerking his thumb toward the prostrate monster. "She's like one of those sanitarium bums; always got some ailment or other. I call her 'Maria' because she's so crochety." The stranger grinned again. He was a rough looking chap and one felt that the roughness was not all a matter of clothes, though his leather coat, peaked cap and baggy trousers tucked into high boots would account for a good deal in that line.

Georgia stared at him with a frown, the puzzled frown that you see on the face of a child confronted suddenly with a strange child.

"I suppose," she ventured after a moment of silence, during which the man resumed his tinkering, "that you're from San Antonio,—the Air Patrol?"

"Right you are, ma'am, and a long way from home and dinner," he added with a shrug of his broad shoulders.

"I thought you people had your regular beats?" continued Georgia, ignoring the hint contained in the last sentence. She wasn't at all sure that she liked the man's looks. She liked the shoulders, and the splendid muscles which she divined must go with so sturdy a frame; and she liked the canny blue eyes which seemed to be trying to neutralize the bulldog tendency of the rest of the face. They were not altogether successful. It was not a winning face like Alec Stanley's; it showed both obstinacy and temper. Georgia prided herself upon her ability to read character in spite of many embarrassing failures in the past.

"Anybody with a grain of sense," she decided, "could see that he has a temper. He's dying to kick that plane for getting out of order and me for not asking him to dinner. Of course, I'll have to do it before I get through. That's the worst of this country. If a leper happened by at dinner time, I'd have to ask him to draw up a chair and sit down. Just the same, he can worry a bit first."

"Well," replied the airman, "we do. Still, that don't prevent us traveling around now and then on special orders."

"I didn't suppose there was anything in this quiet neighborhood to interest the patrol."

"I could answer you better if I knew just where this neighborhood was," was the reply.

"Oh, you mean that you're lost?"

"Not lost, exactly, but off my track a bit."

"Don't you carry maps of the country?"

"Yes, but what's a man going to do when the map and the country don't agree? See here, youngster ——"

Georgia stiffened angrily. This, then, was the reason for the free and easy manner! Didn't the idiot know that all women wore short skirts these days?

"I'm not a youngster, please," she interrupted. "I weigh a hundred and twenty pounds and I expect to vote at the next presidential election."

"Well," grinned the stranger. "I'm sorry—twice. You oughtn't to weigh more than a hundred and ten for your height and I don't hold with women voting. But, as I was saying, I went wrong at about ten o'clock this morning; at least, that was about the time I noticed that the map and the country didn't agree. Do you mind telling me exactly where we are?"

"I'm surprised at your asking a mere female anything so important," snapped Georgia. She wasn't in the habit of snapping at strangers, which added to her irritation.

"Oh, I don't mind taking a woman's advice about anything she really knows," smiled the airman, pleasantly. "The trouble is that those ain't the subjects they want to give it on, as a rule. Do you live around here? But of course you do, being on foot."

"I live at Angus, which is half a mile down yonder," replied the girl, with dignity. "The Angus Mining and Improvement Company has its plant here."

"Thank you. I don't seem to recall the name. It's not the town I saw on the railroad just before I landed?"

"No, that was Carrizo."

"I see. I am off my beat if I'm near Carrizo,—ought to have gathered that fact from the railroad."

"Maybe your bump of location isn't very well developed."

"Well, it isn't,—it's rotten. Put me in a strange country and up-stairs at that, where I can't ask questions, and I can do almost anything that I shouldn't."

"Then you're new to New Mexico?"

"Yes. I used to work on a ranch in Arizona ten or twelve years ago, but I've lived in the East since then and now I'm just back from France."

"You were in the air service there?" All resentment dropped from Georgia's voice.

"Yes. I was an automobile chap, racing, you know, when the war broke out and I couldn't rest till I got up. My bad location nearly got me in bad over there. I dropped right into the enemy's lines one day as neat as if I'd been asked to breakfast."

"Oh! How did you get out again?" Georgia's capitulation was complete.

"Well, I guess they were rather surprised themselves and their fool killer was busy somewhere else. They went for their Archies just as it dawned on me that I was looking down at the wrong kind of uniform, so I let loose one of my guns and beat it. I guess the luck that takes care of idiots got me off. But for a while I was thanking my stars I wasn't a married man."

"This country must seem awfully tame after that sort of thing."

"Tame? Oh, I don't know. There's enough doing anywhere if a man keeps his eyes open, I reckon. Doctoring this fool thing's internal ailments keeps me darned busy, especially when I fly without a partner."

"I'm going home to dinner, now," graciously, "won't you stop work and go with me? You may be rather late getting back to San Antone."

"Thank you, ma'am, I'd sure like to, but I won't leave the old girl. You never know who may come along and drop a monkey wrench in the machinery."

"But nobody ever comes along here. This trail doesn't lead anywhere but to our place."

"Better not take any chances till we have to," was the short reply. "An hour's work will put her right again and I'll be on my way. I've got a sandwich or two laid away for emergencies. Just as much obliged."

"You're quite welcome," a little stiffly. "I hope you won't lose your way again." Georgia swung down the trail a bit miffed. "Let him go hungry if he doesn't know enough to accept a civil invitation," she told herself. "Besides, I do not like his looks and I know he's a rough one. All sorts of people went into the aviation."

Georgia said nothing about the airman at dinner. She could not have told why. It would have been a natural topic under the circumstances, and Mr. Jeff would have been filled with wrath had he dreamed that he was being cheated out of so fruitful a bit of gossip. But though she chatted gayly

about Mrs. Patterson and Pancho Villa and even narrated that lady's fears on the subject of bandit raids, she said not a word about the aviator and his ailing plane. She did not wash the dinner dishes, however, as was her custom, but stacked them neatly on the kitchen table and a little later, when Alec had gone up-stairs for a nap and Mr. Jeff was out on the veranda enjoying his noonday pipe, she quietly packed a few things into a basket, and taking on her arm a pail of hot coffee, started, by means of a back door, up the trail leading to the pasture.

"You can't let people starve right on your property just because you don't happen to like the shape of their chins," she told herself as she came in sight of the plane and the tinkerer. "And I certainly would like to know what those special orders were!"

"Oh, there you are again!" remarked the young man. "I've just got her ready to fly."

"That's good. I've brought you a bit of dinner. Sandwiches are awfully poor fodder for the war-path," smiled the girl, setting down the pail and the basket.

"Say, that's good of you! I am hungry. Thanks a lot," sitting down and beginning to eat without ceremony.

"Not at all. We aim to do our share in the sup-

port of the military. You are on the war-path, I suppose?"

"War-path nothing! Just scouting around. Say, that's grand pie; you make it?"

Georgia nodded. "I have to make everything we eat and I get mighty tired of it sometimes."

"I'll bet you do." He ate for a few moments in silence while Georgia strolled over to inspect the prostrate Maria. When he had finished eating, the airman drew from his pocket a map. "This," he said, pointing to a spot, "is where I ought to be right now."

Georgia studied the map thoughtfully. "I see," she said, "over near Three Rocks. How high do you fly?"

"Usually about two thousand feet. We can spot anything queer from that height and come lower to see what's going on. We've got the cavalry skinned on that. Well, young lady, I'll be going. I've not got my card with me, but I'm Dave Sullivan, of the Air Patrol, San Antonio, and I'll never forget you or your pie as long as I live."

"Thank you," giggled Georgia. He was very funny when he tried to be polite, like a big dog sitting up and giving you its paw. "I haven't any card, either, but I don't mind telling you that I am Georgia Phelps, Postmistress at Angus."

"Postmistress? Golly! They make 'em young in this neck of the woods. Well, adios, Miss Phelps, and thank you for the handout."

"Don't mention it. Adios!" she replied.

"Au revoir and merci beaucoup!" he said in doughboy French, and before she had walked very far down the trail the big plane was almost out of sight.

"Georgia," remarked Mr. Jeff, looking up from a perusal of the El Paso *Times* that evening, "have you heerd anything that sounded like one of them flyin' machines to-day?"

"Yes, I rather thought I did, once or twice. Why?"

"Wal, so did I. It's my idee that there's something goin' on over to-ward Mesa and them patrols is lookin' it up. Listen to this: 'It is suspected that a small party of deserters who escaped from Fort Bliss a few days ago with four machine guns and a quantity of ammunition in their possession, did not cross the border at Juarez as was thought at first. It is believed that the men are still on this side of the line and will attempt to smuggle the guns over at a more accessible point. The fiscal guards on the other side have been notified and the Government will make every effort to apprehend the smugglers.' I'll bet you that flying man is

after them deserters over around Mesa," pursued Mr. Jeff, knowingly.

"It doesn't say anything about Mesa," objected Georgia.

"Wal, you don't suppose them papers tells all they knows, do you?" demanded Mr. Jeff, wisely. "You wait and see."

"So!" said Georgia to herself. "That's the special orders. Well, he needn't have been so tight about it, trying to fool me with that yarn about being lost, too. Well, Mr. Dave Sullivan, if you'd told me the truth, I might have saved you some trouble, for if those deserters aren't in Texas Park at this very minute, I'll eat my hat, the new one that Mother's going to bring me, so there!"

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE OF CARLOS BACA

As a matter of fact, Georgia did Mr. David Sullivan an injustice. Reticent he had been but not untruthful. The U. S. Government does not as a rule pick for confidential service young men who chat of its affairs to strange young women, beautiful though they may be; therefore he had not spoken of deserting soldiers or stolen machine guns. He had, however, been quite honest in pointing out Three Rocks as his goal. The tip as to the fugitives had come from that neighborhood, and he had been bound in that direction but had overshot the mark when motor difficulties had forced him to land and tinker.

What is in the minds of birdmen as they sail about, breaking laws of gravitation at every nose dip? Do they meditate on the mysteries of the strange element which surrounds them, or is their attention taken up entirely with the refractory machines upon which their lives depend? Or are their thoughts as those of ordinary men? For

other flyers we may not answer, but Dave Sullivan without doubt was thinking first of the very excellent food he had just eaten and secondly of the pretty girl who had fed him.

"Pie like Mother used to make!" he remarked warmly. "Some girl that. One of these days some chap around these diggings is going to be in luck." Mr. Sullivan was no poet but a very human being, slightly sentimental for the moment, as, we are told, good food is apt to render the male of the species. "Game looking youngster, too. If I'd been sure of Maria's acting white I'd have given her a ride. Bet she'd have liked it."

So thinking, Dave flew over Mesa, quite oblivious to the excitement he was causing the gingerbread-colored population of that interesting place. He flew over Texas Park a little later, but Texas Park presented a particularly innocent appearance that afternoon. A few scattered ranches and an unusual number of trees for that region, owing to the fact that an offshoot of the Rio Bonito wound its enlivening way through the foot-hills, causing cottonwoods to spring up along its sides. Maria was behaving rather decently for her and though it was getting on toward four o'clock Dave continued to fly southwest.

The capture of the deserters, some half a dozen men who had broken away from a post further

north, was important, but the capture of the four machine guns and the ammunition which they had carried off with them was much more so. Four machine guns capably handled could make any amount of trouble for any scouting party which the U. S. Government might find it necessary to send over the border. Dave found himself thinking, rather more seriously than was his wont, of the deserters. He had lived roughly himself and had known many of the type which drifts into the Army for no particular reason and drifts out again quite as aimlessly. He sometimes sympathized with the drifters against his better sense. Drifting in parties of six, however, and accompanied by machine guns, was another sort of thing. It smacked of a definite plan and without doubt of collusion with some of the guerilla bands which infest the border.

"And somehow," moralized the airman, "it gets a fellow's goat to see our own boys mixing with those chaps over there. Stick to your own color, say I—oh, by golly!" This was in answer to an ominous sound from the motor. Maria was undoubtedly showing a yellow streak. Dave looked down. No landing place there. He had struck a group of foot-hills well sprinkled with spiky looking pines, and giving small promise of a place to go to earth. He gave his attention to the motor—

there was no doubt that something was radically wrong. The next moment the plane began to drop, slowly but undeniably. Dave set his teeth grimly. Most absurdly, before his mental vision, came the figure of the pretty girl of Angus.

"Well, girlie," he found himself saying, "I meant to come back and ask for another piece of that pie one of these days, but Maria's figured things differently, so adios! Whew!" This last was a whistle of amazement. The foot-hills had opened and revealed a tiny canyon, in the midst of which stood a cabin of adobe, a small orchard and a corral containing an astonished burro.

With a sigh of relief, Dave steered for the clearing, back of the house. It was small, but it gave some hope of a landing place. Suddenly, as the earth shot up to meet him, three small brown objects shot up with it. In the middle of his chosen landing place, gazing up at him in wide-eyed amazement, stood two small brown boys and a brown dog. There was no time to think. Maria would touch ground in ten seconds. With a convulsive effort, Dave threw his strength into one movement. The machine responded, and in another minute, there was a crash, a tearing of wings, a ripping, pounding sound and then quiet.

Dave opened his eyes much to his own astonishment some half a dozen seconds later and moved

one leg cautiously. It seemed normal. He tried the other. That, too, responded to suggestion. It might be worth while to investigate an arm or two, he concluded. Both were apparently quite sound.

"Well," he gasped, raising his head and looking about him. "Either I've gone nutty or I've made it. Maria's treed us both, by gosh!"

Sure enough, the machine had impaled itself and its pilot neatly on a clump of apple trees in the orchard back of the cabin, much to the amazement of the two small boys and the dog, who, quite unaware of their very narrow escape, were running to the rescue. They paused, shyly, underneath a neighboring tree and gazed fearfully up at the huge monster and its human freight. The dog, a tiny Chihuahua, who, whether because of superior intelligence or more impudence, was not scared, barked shrilly. Had it been possible to his kind of dog, he would undoubtedly have barked savagely. Dave glanced down, amused, in spite of his predicament.

"Look here, youngsters," he said, "call off your bloodhound and get a ladder. I want to come down."

Two grins, one of them toothless, rewarded this display of wit. "No spik Englis, us," said the older boy, shyly.

"That's unlucky," said Dave, shaking one leg

free from the débris of Maria. "I'm not in just the best shape to dig for my Spanish, but I reckon I'll have to or shin down this tree." Dave clambered from his perch and after a moment's reflection managed a few sentences in Spanish. It was rusty Spanish, dating back to his Arizona days, but it had the desired effect.

"You see, young gentlemen, my position is awkward, to say the least. Miles from home with a busted plane, what would you suggest?" Again the youngsters grinned, but not so shyly. He of the toothless gums showed an almost perceptible desire to make friendly overtures, but was restrained by the elder brother, who spoke with deliberate courtesy.

"It will be dark in two more hours. The Señor had better stay with us for the night."

"For the night, eh? How far are you from Three Rocks?"

But this was too much for the nine-year-old's intelligence. He shook his head. He did not know Three Rocks.

"From town, then? Any town that has a telegraph office."

Another shake of the head. Telegraph office represented also a new idea; but at the word "town," the little chap found his tongue.

"We are fifteen miles from Capitan," he said

gravely. "Me, I have been there once in a wagon," he added proudly.

Fifteen miles! Dave eyed the toothless one with a disgusted look and groaned.

"Good Lord! Have you got a horse on the place?"

"No, Señor," the elder boy replied with the same old-fashioned courtesy, a sort of Greaser Little Lord Fauntleroy, Dave told himself with a grin. "My father and mother and Uncle José have taken the wagon and horses to go to the baile."

"Oh, that's the racket, is it? Then I expect I'm fixed here till daylight doth appear! That's about the time your bailes break up, ain't it? I mean"—dropping laboriously into Spanish, "your family won't be back till morning?"

The youngsters nodded gravely.

"Well, there's one thing about bad luck in this country—you can generally trust it to keep up till you've had all you want of it," said Dave, with resignation. "All right; suppose we go up to the house and have a cup of tea and a chat, seeing as we're beginning to understand each other so well."

The boys grinned. Both of them knew more English than they were willing to admit. Later on perhaps they would try to talk with this fascinating stranger who spoke such funny Spanish. They trotted ahead of him toward the cabin. They

were dirty little ragamuffins, clad in nondescript brown garments from which their brown faces rose with scarce a variation in color.

"Poor little devils!" ruminated the aviator, "they're mighty nigh as bad off as if they were on the other side of the line. Which reminds me, I must be somewhere near that same line myself. How far is it to the border, Jim?" he asked the older boy. The child frowned and seemed not to understand. "Well, I reckon fifteen or twenty miles will be about the figure. This Capitan place that Lord Fauntleroy the second went to in a wagon is on the other side, that I know."

Somewhat winded by the climb to the cabin which was on a little hill above the orchard, Dave seated himself in a broken chair in the doorway—the interior was not inviting—and mopped his brow. The younger boy, obeying a whisper from his brother, took a tin cup from a nail in the doorway and filled it with cold water from an olla, offering it to the guest with the shy politeness of a young prince in rags. Then both of them, followed by the dog, disappeared into the cabin, from which came presently the sound of a fire in the process of building.

Dave chuckled. "Goin' to ask me to dinner, I suppose. Gosh, ain't it a shame kids have to grow up! Here's these two—give 'em ten years more and

they'll be the same dirty, knifin', lyin' greasers as the rest of the family. Now, they're little gentlemen. Well, it's getting cold in this man's country; guess I'll go inside and give the banquet the once over."

The sun had sunk entirely and the fresh cool wind that night brings to the desert country was beginning to be felt. The visitor rose and entered the cabin. The children had lighted a lamp and he saw the usual poverty-stricken interior, cleaner than many, but most unalluring. The bedstead in one corner, a shakedown in another, a couple of rickety chairs, a table and a stove indicated that the room was dining-room, kitchen and bedroom. A battered coffee-pot and a blackened earthenware bowl containing frijoles were also in evidence, and in a moment the younger boy produced from a cupboard a loaf of brown bread and a knife, and began hacking off chunks very efficiently.

"Blamed handy with a knife, even the babies," grinned Dave. "Comes as easy to 'em as fighting to the Irish."

The older boy had seized the coffee-pot and was about to fill it with water when Dave stopped him.

"Let me make the coffee while you rustle the frijoles," he said. "I'll show you how Uncle Sam's soldiers made it in France." The boy looked blank; France evidently meant little to him; but he re-

linquished the pot and Dave, glancing inside, saw the usual black mess at the bottom. The native of the Southwest does not begin the evening coffee with a fresh brew; he warms up the dregs of past delights and is satisfied.

"I'm not what you'd call a fussy chap," Dave soliloquized, as he went outside and carefully emptied the mess, "but there's things that are too much for me. I'll say I like to begin my own coffee." When he returned with the empty pot and found the new supply of coffee, he relieved the nerve tension of his hosts by depositing a silver dollar on the table. "For the mother to buy more coffee, sabe?" he said.

"Si, Señor," and with four big black eyes fixed solemnly upon his every movement, Dave proceeded to make the coffee.

It was a queer supper, eaten in half darkness, and to an accompaniment of chatter part English and part Spanish. The father's name, Dave gathered, was Baca, Carlos Baca, and he was lame. There was another brother, fourteen years old, but he was up in the mountains herding goats; also there was a baby, gone to the baile with the mother. They were evidently deadly poor, but father and mother and Uncle José could enjoy a night of dancing and hilarity with all the abandon of the idle rich. "Well, so much the better for Father, Mother

and Uncle José!" reflected Dave, with a shrug of commiseration for the fourteen-year-old alone in the mountains.

"What do you little chaps do all day?" he asked.

"Oh, many things!" he was told. There was wood to be gathered, they went out with the burro to get it and the father took it to town to sell, there was fishing sometimes up in the mountains, and then there were the books. Seeing the American's look of surprise, the older boy ran to a cupboard in the corner and came proudly back with half a dozen battered picture books.

"But they're in English!" Dave said, perplexed.

"Si, Señor;" the older boy smiled patiently. "The mother reads a little English and she explains. An American lady sends them." He pointed to the title page of one and Dave saw in dashing stub pen chirography: "To Juan and Luis from their friend, Georgia Phelps, Angus, New Mexico."

"Oh," he chuckled, "so you know my pie girl? I mean, you are acquainted with the postmistress at Angus?" Oh, yes, they knew her very well; once she had given them a dog. The older brother had him up in the mountains, but she never came to see them any more. She was afraid of the bandits, they supposed.

"I reckon so," said Dave, half to himself. "This is pretty rough country for a nice girl like her to be traveling." Then, to the boys: "Maybe she'll send you some more books along about Christmas time, and if she don't, by gum, I will!"

Finally, the feast being over, and the débris disposed of, man-fashion, by scouring out coffee-pot and frying-pan with sand and washing them in the stream which rushed by at the foot of the hill, the two youngsters curled up in the shakedown, and Dave, wrapped in a calico quilt of dubious color, lay down on the floor by the window. His thoughts, as well as the subdued whispers and giggles which came from the shakedown, kept him awake. Something in the situation of these pitiful children had brought back memories of his own childhood, almost as forlorn, almost as wretched. Poor little kids! Nothing behind and nothing ahead of them! True, he had himself risen out of surroundings seemingly hopeless, but this, he would have told you, was the Irish in him. The Irish always rose.

He remembered the desolate little farm back in Wisconsin where he had been born. It had been owned by his mother's mother, herself a widow with a family of growing children. He remembered his mother; rather a pretty girl she must have been, he thought. His father, an Irish immigrant who had drifted out to the middle west, working on farms,

had married the pretty girl and then after a few years of marriage had died, and the grandmother had taken mother and children into her home, and the two women had run the farm and brought up the children, who scarcely knew the difference between grandmother and mother.

Dave's own adventures as stowaway, sailor, cowboy, mechanic, automobile racer and finally air pilot, would have filled a dozen volumes unexpurgated. Toned down to fit the regulations they would still have made interesting and profitable reading. He had been everything except a loafer. Back of the Irish farmhand and the pathetic little Wisconsin toiler had been men and women who had not been afraid either to work or to fight, and who had transmitted to their descendents a vitality and a determination to make good which was quite evident in Dave's career. Dave, himself, had in his make-up considerable obstinacy and a touch of the brute. Something that was resentful of control or even of its semblance was very much alive in him, and awaited a civilizing process yet to come.

Whether thoughts of the past had made him wakeful, or whether it was the result of something in his surroundings, it was some time before Dave added his regular breathing to the sounds which came from the shakedown and peace reigned in the house of Carlos Baca.

CHAPTER VI

ACROSS THE LINE

A MEXICAN baile has one characteristic in common with an Irish wake—it usually lasts into the wee hours of the morning. Add to this the fact that the guests are drawn from a radius of many miles, and arrive by almost every known method of conveyance, and you will understand why Dave Sullivan felt reasonably free from the prospect of interference before morning.

Carlos Baca, who was very lame and attended dances not to dance but to partake of other conviviality which such occasions afford, drove his wife and sleepy baby in a half broken-down wagon, drawn by two ill-kept horses. That is to say, Carlos held the reins while the tired team did the rest. José Baca, a younger brother, rode ahead of the wagon. He, too, had partaken liberally and was indebted largely to his horse for direction. None of the party was in a hurry and it was very nearly six o'clock, indeed, the sun was well up in the sky, when they entered the canyon in which Carlos' cabin stood. Then it was that like the famous three

bears of history they began to make discoveries; discoveries that woke them instantly, driving away the haze with which the evening's exertions had clouded whatever it was that served in the place of intellect for Carlos and José.

The first shock was the sight of Maria, resting like a disabled roc, on four of the only promising trees in Carlos' unlucky orchard. José, riding ahead, saw the machine first, and reining in his tired brute with a grunt of dismay, turned to point it out to Carlos.

"An airship! Sainted Virgin! The border patrol without a doubt! Is it then possible that they——" José paused and Carlos laughed discordantly.

"Not they! When they come the world knows it. A great deal of noise but very little done, that is the gringo way. No, something has happened to the accursed machine."

"But the pilot?" persisted José, spurring his horse.

"Dead, probably. There has been an accident and my trees have been injured. Someone shall pay," and Carlos urged the tired team. The woman at his side rubbed her eyes sleepily; a look of fear came into her face and she muttered something about "the little ones."

"The little ones are safe enough," Carlos

answered, roughly. "The gringos do not hurt children."

"But, Carlos, an accident ——"

"Be still, foolish one, I am tired of listening to your voice. José, is that a man standing in the doorway?"

"The pilot, undoubtedly; he wears their leather coat," replied José. "I will speak to him, but come quickly, he may not understand our tongue." José, himself, was somewhat handicapped in the matter of languages, and was not proud of his English.

"Well, good-morning, folks, how was the dance? I have to thank you for a night's lodging, Señor Baca." Dave addressed José pleasantly. "I'm from San Antonio—border patrol, you know. My plane went wrong and I guess I've mussed up your orchard some, but you'll be paid whatever's right and proper."

"Si, Señor," José's voice was ingratiating. "It is the orchard of my brother, Carlos. Me, I am José Baca."

"I see." And as Carlos drove up to the cabin, Dave continued, "I've spent the night with your young family, Señor Carlos, and it looks like I'd have to stay on for breakfast, if you don't mind."

At this, the woman climbed out of the wagon and ran into the house, while José dismounted and

threw the bridle reins over his pony's head, breaking into a voluble stream of Spanish out of which Dave managed to grasp the words "you are welcome" and something which sounded like "the honor of the house."

"Smooth, these chaps; no wonder the kids have pretty manners," Dave thought. "Old brother Carlos isn't quite so tickled to see me as brother José is, or I miss my guess."

Carlos Baca's face was sullen and ugly, but he made an effort to appear hospitable, and echoed a few of José's impassioned syllables, while sounds from the house suggested that the Señora was setting about preparing breakfast.

"If you can drive me either to Three Rocks or Mesa, I'll make it worth your while," Dave suggested, pleasantly. "I'll have to long distance San Antone and see about getting some help with the machine," with a jerk of his thumb toward the ailing Maria.

"Three Rocks!" the brother stared in amazement. "Impossible! Three Rocks was entirely too far to drive. Besides," it was Carlos who spoke, "one may not ——" but at that moment José broke in with another torrent of Spanish in which Dave was lost completely.

"Hold on!" he said, "I don't get you when you rattle it off like that. Give it to me easy. If Three

Rocks is too far, what is your nearest town? Or maybe there's a ranger cabin nearer?" Then, as both brothers disclaimed any knowledge of rangers, he took out his map and pointed. "Three Rivers —Mesa—here's the border. Now where do you figure this ranch of yours is, right here, eh?" he touched with his finger a point just north of the border.

Had Dave been watching José Baca instead of the map he would have seen that young man shoot a warning look at his brother, but he was not. He looked up into Carlos' sullen face and heard him say thickly: "Si, Señor, just there," pointing to a spot just to the left of Dave's finger.

"Well, then," continued the latter, curtly, "that's not too far to drive and you know it. Mesa's probably twelve or fifteen miles nearer. Your horses are all in, I reckon, so we'll give 'em till noon to rest up and then we'll start. Put me where I can get a long distance connection with San Antone and you'll be well paid for your trouble. Understand?"

There was something in Dave's eye that did not encourage back talk. Also there was an ugly look about his chin. He had a way when he chose of darting it forward which suggested caricatures of prize-fighters in ugly moods. Carlos Baca swallowed suddenly and murmured: "Si, Señor." Then

he turned to lead the horses toward the corral. Dave strolled down to the orchard and surveyed Maria sullenly.

"Nice mess this!" he murmured. "Unless I'm a lot mistaken you'll never fly again, old girl, and yet we'll have to have a try at putting you to rights, if I can get the Post on the wire and have Edwards sent down to help me—and in the meantime the boys I'm after are making a clean getaway with the guns! Don't like these greasers' looks either; one of 'em is too sulky and the other's too polite." Dave felt of the revolver in his belt with a sense of comfort, then was a bit ashamed of himself for taking the situation so seriously. He strolled back to the cabin where Señora Baca had prepared coffee and tortillas. She was a frightened looking woman who evidently stood in considerable awe of her menfolk.

"Señor," José began, with great politeness, "my brother and I have spoken together of your unhappy plight. His horses are too poor for so long a trip, but we have a neighbor, Ortega, who has a good horse. I will get it and then I will guide you, myself, not to Three Rocks but to Mesa, where you will find a post-office where there is a telephone. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes, that sounds all right," replied Dave.

"Maybe we shall find a ranger outfit nearer than

Mesa, but if not, we go all the way to Mesa. My horse is strong; a little rest and he will do it."

"That suits me, amigo, and I'll see to it that your time isn't wasted. When do you figure to start?"

"About noon. It is a mile to the ranch of Ortega."

It was considerably after noon, however, when José returned leading the borrowed mount, an evil looking pinto, accompanied by Ortega, who rode a buckskin.

"Juan Ortega," presented José, "he will go with us to bring back the horse. Me, I do not come back this way."

"You ride, Señor?" asked the newcomer.

"Well, as it happens, I do," replied Dave, eyeing the pinto with strong disfavor. "And it looks to me as if I was going to have to. That brute's got a dirty disposition, if I know anything of horseflesh."

José grinned. "If the Señor prefers my horse?"

"I prefer my own legs," snapped Dave, "but being as I'm on Government business and in a hurry, I'll risk my neck on this calico devil." A few moments later they rode out of the canyon. "I don't know which member of this caravan I like the least," he thought. "One of 'em's too slick to be true and the other one's got all the earmarks

of a thief. As for this doggone pinto, he's going to break my neck if he gets the ghost of a show. Well, youngsters," for the two boys had followed them a little way, "don't blow those quarters I gave you on lobster palaces or the movies. Adios! Here, you rat-tailed son of a gun, keep your head up and maybe we won't come to blows for a mile or two anyhow."

The road—it would not be dignified by that name in most localities, but it was a road, for the Bacas had driven it with their wagon—led for a mile or so along a fairly level grade, chopped badly with chuck holes and dry river beds; then José, who rode ahead, for Dave had maneuvered himself into the last of the party, turned into a trail which led up to a mesa along which they traveled for nearly another hour. It was very hot in spite of the little breeze which swept the mesa, and Dave was disappointed to see that there were no signs of habitation in the vicinity, no houses, fences or even cattle. The country had an unfamiliar look, too; he did not remember having seen any of it the day before while flying, but the direction was right and he said nothing.

Suddenly José's head disappeared. He was descending by means of an abrupt and very rocky trail which led into a dry river bed or arroyo, with high walls, through which they rode, for hours, it

seemed to Dave, who had not been in the saddle for months and who found the means of travel exasperatingly slow after the airy flights to which he was accustomed. Also, the arroyo was full of turns and windings. It was like a maze. Dave's sense of direction was lost completely after an hour of this, and he was thankful when at last they climbed out of it and came into a narrow little canyon, evidently little traveled, as the trail was nearly obliterated by the closeness of the undergrowth.

Dave caught his breath suddenly. The vague doubts which had been assailing him suddenly crystallized. He glanced at the sun, which, it being nearly four o'clock, should have been over his left shoulder. It was not. It was over his right one and was gradually sinking behind a mountain in that direction.

"The fool's lost," he told himself, disgustedly. "We're going southwest, almost due south, and have been ever since we came out of that arroyo. I don't see how he can be lost in his own country, either, that's too absurd. They're up to something crooked, that's it. Well, I've got my gun and while I'm not longing to use it, I don't know why I should stand for any humbug from a couple of bow-legged greasers. So, here goes. Wonder if they're heeled? Knives, anyhow, I suppose. Say, you José Baca, what's the big idea? We've been going southwest

1036681

about long enough; we'll go the other way now for a spell, sabe?"

The two whirled instantly, suspicion in their faces. It was a suspicion well justified, apparently, for the American's hand rested easily upon the butt of a revolver.

"Señor!" José's voice was injured. "I am taking you by a short cut to Mesa. For a time we continue in this direction, then we turn ——"

"Oh, I see! Well, I'd rather turn now, if it's all the same to you and your friend." He spoke in English, and though José's grasp of that language was superficial, his comprehension of the ways of guns was deep and inborn. With a thoroughly Latin shrug he turned his horse. Ortega followed suit. Dave waited till they were ahead of him on the trail, then touched the pinto with his heel. "We'll go back about half a mile till we get to that trail I saw that struck off toward the east," he said, briefly.

"I cannot guide the Señor to Mesa if he insists upon taking the wrong trail," José muttered, then in English: "He damn bad trail, zis one, you onderstan'? I don't know can ze horse go zis one."

"Oh, I guess they'll make it!" Dave's voice was hard. "My business can't be done on the other side of the border, sabe? Hustle along there,

pronto, or we won't get anywhere. And that's a blamed good guess, too," he concluded to himself. "We'll never make Mesa to-night. I've got to shake this bunch somewhere for I don't want to camp out with 'em, that's plain."

As they retraced their way to the trail which Dave had marked almost subconsciously, he asked himself again what their object could be in deliberately misleading him. If it was robbery, why had they not accomplished it at the Baca ranch? If it was to lure him across the border, what was there in it for Baca and Ortega, who would have to return to American soil and face the music? Perhaps, after all, he had been hasty. Well, he would know soon enough, and in the meantime it was hot, indisputably, unbearably, pestiferously hot! The horses plodded wearily along. The pinto had forgotten to be vicious and José's much enduring mount was plainly fagged. They had seen no water since leaving the ranch. The two Mexicans grumbled and cursed in low tones, occasionally casting an ugly glance over a shoulder at the gringo who persisted in choosing such a trail to travel.

"Looks like I had picked a bad one," soliloquized Dave, ruefully, as the ponies negotiated a particularly nasty place with a care which showed that they considered it a serious matter. "But I can't

back down now; they'd have a knife in me in no time."

They met no one. The place was loneliness itself. Once a distant horse neighed and the pinto replied, but no one appeared. Some lonely traveler, evidently, on another side of the hills that surrounded them. Suddenly, the trail took a dip and the two riders disappeared. Dave's horse started rapidly after them. There, at the foot of the incline, across the trail, ran a narrow thread of water, almost hidden in the brush that grew along its sides, but making a pleasant little noise as it hurried along on business strictly its own. With one accord the men dismounted and threw themselves down on their stomachs to drink—the horses further down-stream were already doing so.

The intense physical comfort of the moment drove every other thought from Dave's mind. He was as happy momentarily as the pinto.

"Gosh! That stream came just in time to ——" The sentence was never finished, for José Baca was on top of the speaker and José Baca's arms were pinning his arms to his sides so that the revolver was useless. With a snarl of rage, Dave threw himself over, carrying, by sheer force of bulk, the clinging José with him, and reversing the position altogether. It was the Mexican, now, who was underneath. while the American lay on top. The

advantage, however, was small. Baca kept his numbing grip, and struggle as he would, Dave could not free either arm. The worst he could do was to strike furiously with his heavy boot heel at José's less heavily protected shins and wring a howl of rage from him. The grip did not relax, and the two men, their heads in the water, rolled and gasped and swore, neither gaining any real advantage over the other.

"If there was any real water in this stream, I'd drown you, you infernal idiot!" gasped Dave, furiously, adding a few less polite remarks through clenched teeth, remarks which José returned in voluble Spanish, a neat medium for curses.

Ortega, in the meantime, stood over them. He had an evil-looking knife in his belt, but candidly had no desire to use it. He was a born pacifist, was Ortega, who had been lured into a matter little to his taste. He had no wish to knife this Americano who fought like Villa and swore like a Texas ranger. Such men were well left alone, warned Ortega's better judgment. Still, on the other hand, was it not highly probable that once having finished José Baca, the madman would start in on him, Ortega? Moved by this powerful thought, he added himself to the struggling mass and groped frenziedly for the revolver.

Dave felt Ortega's weight strike him and realized

that the game was up. Of course they would come at him two to one. Still, his fighting devil was roused and he could no more have stopped than can the bulldog who has fastened his jaw in the other dog's throat. The dark face of Ortega came closer as he pressed down on the other two, his hand groping ever for the revolver. At last he had it. Dave felt it being dragged from its holster. Furious with rage, helpless under José's terrible grip, Dave threw his head backward and seized the ear of Ortega between his teeth with a vicious clamp.

Ortega was a man of peace. He had seized the revolver with the purely amicable intention of subduing the Americano without bloodshed; but even a pacifist has his limits. With an anguished cry, Ortega jerked the revolver from its holster, there was a loud report, and the three men rolled instantly apart; the smoking revolver dropping from Ortega's frightened grasp and lying upon the ground beside José Baca, from whose shoulder blood was flowing. Dave pounced upon it and held it in the face of the paralyzed Ortega.

"Go through him and get his gun if he's got one, or his knife if he hasn't. If you leave anything on him and he tries to use it, I'll get you sure, understand?"

Ortega muttered something, and drew his arm across his wet brow.

"What? Oh, shucks, you haven't killed him! It wouldn't matter much if you had; he's a bad hombre. Hurry up, it's getting late."

Ortega timorously approached the prostrate José and cautiously removed a revolver and two knives from various parts of him, handing them to Dave.

"So! Got anything yourself? Oh, a knife. Well, I'll take that. Now, if you want to bandage him up, go to it. I hardly think it's worth while, myself, but you know him better than I do."

José, however, had risen by this time and shed his coat. The wound was a slight one and between them they effected a bandage.

"You're a funny chap," remarked Dave, curiously. "All rigged up like an arsenal and couldn't do any better than to hop on a man's back when he's down. What's the game, anyhow?"

José, sulky and ominous of face, declined to answer, but went on arranging his bandage. Ortega started after the three horses which were wandering down-stream.

"Well, I guess I don't want any more of you as a guide," continued Dave. "And I think the late unpleasantness will just about wipe out my feeling any obligation to pay you the money we talked about up at the ranch. I'll take this pinto and use him and when I'm through with him I'll send him back to you. You can thank your lucky stars that

I don't intend to take the matter up with a Federal officer."

Ortega, who had returned with the horses, mounted without a word, but José broke into a torrent of angry Spanish.

"You needn't bluster, because I can't understand, and threats that I don't understand don't bother me one bit." Dave threw a leg over the pinto. There was a noise in the brush. The pinto reared and Dave reached the saddle by a miracle just in time to see a party of rough looking Mexicans burst upon the scene.

Ortega, with an exclamation, broke for cover, only to be seized by one of the newcomers and thrown rudely to the ground. Dave was too much occupied by the pinto for a moment to realize what had happened, but he saw Baca approach a man who seemed to be the leader of the party and talk to him in excited Spanish. In the meantime, two men seized the pinto's bridle and bid Dave dismount and give up his guns. They were armed and a very different looking set from Baca and Ortega. It was evident at once that they meant what they said. Into Dave's bewildered mind flashed the thought: "bandits." But what in thunder were they doing on this side? Had there been a raid? Then the leader came toward him and said in fair English:

"Señor, you come with us to the place where we leave our horses. No, not ride—you walk. Come."

"Well, of course, I'll come," replied Dave. "I can't fight a dozen of you, but what's the big idea? What do you mean by grabbing an American aviator on American soil? Don't you know it's a hanging matter?"

The Mexican smiled, a superior smile, even a weary smile.

"The Señor is wrong," he replied, courteously. "He is not on American soil."

"What!" Dave's horror was genuine. José again burst into excited Spanish. "Oh, can that! You know I don't sabe. Let the other fellow talk."

"You are on Mexican soil this twenty-four hours, Señor," was the amused reply. "That cabin of Carlos Baca where you land she is in Sonora. You are now five mile from Capitan, and we take you into the hills to the camp of Felipe Jimenez."

Dave put his hands into his pockets. It was his last attempt at jauntiness.

"All right," he said, "go on. If I'm such a fool as to get into a fix like this I deserve all that's coming to me," and shaking his head disgustedly he fell into step with his captors.

CHAPTER VII

THE BARBECUE

(Being a letter written by Georgia Phelps of Angus, N. M., to Victoria Dunlap, of New York City.)

The Indian Reservation.

MY DEAR MISS DUNLAP:

I don't suppose you have ever heard of me unless perhaps Mr. Farmer has told you about the Angus Mining Company, of which he is the president, and my father is the manager; or, which is more likely, he has told you that he has sent a wounded soldier, named Alexander Stanley, out here to build up. If he has told you this, perhaps he has mentioned me; if not, please let me introduce myself by letter—Georgia Phelps, of Angus, New Mexico. Don't try to find Angus on the map, because it isn't there, but that doesn't matter, for some of the nicest places in the world aren't on maps, the Garden of Eden, for instance. Ask Mr. Farmer to show you a picture of the Company House and then you will know just where and how to imagine Alec Stanley.

You see, I am taking it for granted that you do sometimes try to imagine him. It is very impertinent of me, I know, to jump straight into a love affair which doesn't concern me, but I guess I'm like my father. He is always taking headers into other people's affairs, and, like poor Mr. Pickwick, he usually gets the shovel on one side and the tongs on the other! I hope you won't mind, though, because I think you ought to know some things about Alexander, and if I don't tell you nobody else will. I call him "Alexander" because "Mr. Stanley" is too formal and "Alec" too familiar. I hope, also, that you won't mind his having told me about you. All the young men who come up here tell me those things; the air has that effect on them, I suppose, or else it's the altitude.

To begin with, I am sure that you will like to hear that Alexander is better—oh, quite a lot better than when he came here a week or so ago. He isn't nearly as blue and discouraged, for one thing, though, of course, he has his times of being both; usually around twilight—rather an awful time for anybody who isn't outrageously cheerful. It's principally because he gets to thinking that he doesn't amount to anything and can't do anything, but we are breaking that up by making him do things. Every morning we have a shooting match with revolvers, much to the anguish of Mr. Jeff, an

old man who lives with us and who fully expects to be winged by one or the other of us. He has been very cool to both of us since the shooting began, which is really very unreasonable of him, as the nearest we have come to him was to hit the bucket of feed that he was carrying to the pigs. Alexander has found that he can manage very nicely at this with one hand, which has raised him a good deal in his own estimation. He now hopes to learn to roll cigarettes with one hand à la Bill Hart, which will boost him up another peg.

Also, he rides Beaver, father's horse. Beaver is a perfect gentleman and can be trusted with a wounded soldier, though really Alexander rides very well. Uncle Henry Rogers, our postman, came along one day as we were starting out and said: "Young feller, you shore do set 'em deep!" which is high praise in this part of the country, let me tell you! He has been a godsend to the children of the neighborhood. The little Judsons, who fairly ooze questions, and who hardly ever have a chance to meet anybody but other Judsons, adore him. He has told them more about France and Belgium than the poor lambs will ever learn from books, because we have no school nearer than Lobo, and that burned down last year.

Then there is our old friend, Caspar Freund, who used to be an architect, and who has drawn some

plans for the new school at Lobo (they are going to rebuild if they ever get any money), which he brought over to ask Alexander's advice about. They have been going over them together. Alexander is very much surprised to find that an architect's head is more important than his left arm. I heard him mutter: "Oh, well, guess I'm darned lucky it was an arm and not an eye they grabbed off me!" which, for him, is almost recklessly optimistic. At any rate, he can't say any more that he is useless!

I have often pictured you to myself, Miss Victoria Dunlap. It wasn't hard after seeing the photo which Alexander has of you. It occupies the place of honor in his room, between his mother and a dear, dead bulldog. All three of you are fearfully ornamental and the bulldog is really classy. Just now I am picturing you going out in your automobile, a very lovely one, with a "James" to drive it and a Pekingese on the front seat! I wish you could have seen the outfit that Alexander came up to the barbecue with! But I suppose you don't even know what a "barbecue" is.

Well, out here it is a sort of glorified neighborhood picnic. All of us,—mining folks, creek people, Texans, Indians, and all the rest,—pack up bedding and babies and eats, and take along a horse or two to race or trade, and drive to the Indian Res-

ervation, where we camp out and where the festivities are held. A big pit is dug, and two men, picked for their ripe experience in such matters, barbecue a "crittur" and we eat him amid great rejoicing. He was particularly good this time; even you would have liked him, though Alexander says you have an extraordinary cook. Our cooks, Uncle Henry Rogers and Captain Simon Crowder, are extraordinary, too. Captain Crowder is a hermit prospector, who lives around here and who is a dreadful old autocrat. Alexander is sitting beside him at this present moment, on a log, listening to the tale of the Captain's acquaintance with Billy, the Kid, a New Mexican celebrity. It is a difficult tale to listen to, because the Captain gets mad if you ask the right question at the wrong time, and madder still if you don't ask it at all.

Lots of the Indians bring horses to sell and then we have races. I won one this morning on a bay mare that Uncle Henry's son, Jim, sent over from Texas Park. She is supposed to behave rather badly, but the man who brought her over rode her a while and sort of took the buck out of her. Uncle Henry observed that "ef all womenfolks could work off their contrariness in a few bucks like that mare done, what a grand world this would be!"

But I didn't tell you about our outfit. We drove up, Mr. Jeff, Mrs. Patterson, Mr. Freund, Alexan-

der and I, in our old buckboard with two horses. We were late in starting because Mrs. Patterson and Alexander insisted upon hitching up, Mr. Jeff and I being busy with the bedding and the lunch basket. When they drove up we didn't stop to look at the team, but pitched our baggage in and started off. Alexander said that they didn't seem to go very well that morning. They didn't. They sprang apart as though they yearned to put as many miles as they could between themselves, and then dashed down the road. The dear child had put each horse in on the wrong side, and horses, you know, are powerful sot in their ways!

In the evening we danced. They had a platform, with colored lanterns, and four Mexicans with guitars and mandolins. Alexander was awfully popular. Susie Fuller, from Carrizo, confided to me that he looked exactly like the newspaper pictures of the Prince of Wales. So he does, but they say the Prince isn't much of a dancer, while Alexander dances wonderfully. We have lots of good dancers out here, so I am a judge. There is something almost appalling in the way people take to a nice-looking young man! Why, one of the awfulest looking squaws on the Reservation sold Alexander a basket for half what she charged me, just because he smiled at her. I smiled, too, but being a mere female smile it didn't work.

I really wish you could have seen him dancing with Sarah Jennings, Jim Rogers' girl that was, before she threw him over. Sarah is a belle in these parts. She is tall, blonde and blue-eyed. She has the starery kind of blue eyes—I spelled it that way so that you won't think I mean "starry," which I don't. She has a stiff sense of propriety (we think that's why she threw Jim over, he being very improper), and holds herself like a blonde ramrod. A lot of nice people came over from the Vera Cruz Mine and some not quite so nice from Texas Park, so we had a good time.

Alexander, as I said, was the hit of the occasion. In the old days he would have had a dozen fights on his hands, but everything is tame here nowadays. Even the rough crowd from Texas Park didn't start anything, but stayed by themselves and danced with those girls who didn't mind their being a little drunk. Of course, Jim Rogers not being there may have accounted for this; he generally stirs up a row wherever he goes, but this time he was away somewhere and we had peace.

Here I have rambled along, telling you all sorts of things about people you don't know and aren't interested in—still—I wonder if you won't be a little interested in them because of Alexander, and if my telling you about them won't give you a better idea of the life he is leading than anything else I

could say? Somehow I can't help feeling that you do care for him, though he says you don't; or at least, that you won't when he's been away from you a while. It seems so dreadful to let a stupid thing like money come between people who *care,* and he does care, no matter what he tells you. I am a female crittur and I know! He may flirt with other girls—he *does* flirt with them—he's made that way and he can't help it any more than he could help having measles when young—but you are the one he cares for.

Just the same, don't leave him too long. He's human—quite noticeably so—and while I'd never advise any girl to write to a young man who asked her not to, I think it would be splendid of you to do it. But please don't tell him I wrote to you. He thinks as he sits over on that log listening to those awful and perverting tales of Captain Crowder's, that I am writing to Father, so don't, I beg of you, give me away! I wouldn't dare do it, if it wasn't for the shape of your nose. It is the nose of a woman with a sense of humor—I hope it tells the truth.

With the very best wishes of
Your friend,
GEORGIA PHELPS.

"There!" said Georgia to herself as she folded

the bulky letter and tucked it into her saddle-bag. "I hope I haven't put my foot in it, but you never can tell. Anyhow, I've satisfied my conscience. She ought to know that he's still in love with her, and she ought to know that he isn't the kind to stay in love very long unless she looks after him a bit. I hope she'll write to him."

She looked over at Alec, who at that moment was laughing at one of the Captain's yarns. His hat was off, the bronze hair caught all the glints of the sun, the brown eyes twinkled, the lips parted in a regular boy's laugh. There was something magnetic about the whole man, something to which very few women could be indifferent. Georgia felt a warm little glow of pleasure as she watched him —her eyes grew very soft—she breathed quickly.

"I'm glad I did it," she thought, "whether she likes it or not. Anyhow, I've played fair!"

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE HANDS OF JIMENEZ

DAVE had thought himself uncomfortably warm while making the trip with Baca and Ortega on horseback. When the party proceeded on foot, he knew that he had had only an inkling as to how much heat a man may endure and live;—nay, and walk! The only comfort he derived from the situation came from the fact that Baca and Ortega walked also, three of the enemy having impounded the horses and gone on ahead, the others accompanying the prisoners.

The situation puzzled the airman a good deal. The newcomers, without doubt, belonged to one of the various marauding outfits which do a prosperous business in Northern Mexico. The name of Felipe Jimenez was unfamiliar; evidently his operations had not yet been on a scale sufficiently grand to attract the attention of the press on the other side of the line.

"However, he's big enough to have me lined up and shot at daybreak, if he happens to be that kind of a bandit," decided Dave, gloomily. "What gets

me is how Baca and Ortega expected to sit in this game." His eyes sought them as they plodded sullenly along, prisoners as well as himself. "Well, this country is a live place, I'll say it is. And to think of the little postmistress asking me if I didn't find it tame!"

When the place was reached where the bandits had left their horses, the prisoners were mounted on their own horses, and the party struck off into a trail leading southwest and into the mountains. It was a long trail, a rough trail, and in spite of the cooling wind which sprang up toward evening, a very hot trail. Not once again did they see water, though they climbed in and out of numberless dry river beds. A fearful country to fight, Dave thought, with every advantage on the side of the natives and every hardship on that of the expeditionary force. Aeroplanes would be the solution of the problem to a great extent, he concluded, gloomily, and we never had half enough of them.

The camp of Jimenez was situated, temporarily, for your Mexican bandit is as keen on the move as the city flat dweller, at the head of a long, deep canyon, and was approached by a narrow trail which climbed the right side of the canyon, while on the left, one looked down upon a rushing little mountain stream and across toward a wonderful dark green bank of pines which grew

tall and stiff. The trail, while difficult, was obvious. There was no attempt at a secret hiding place. Evidently Jimenez felt perfectly able to defend himself against anyone likely to attack him.

"Got the Federal Government fixed most likely so long as he don't get too rough," surmised Dave. "Fine country to do as you like in so long as you're not an American."

In selecting the canyon as their headquarters, the bandits had evidently been influenced by the fact that it contained the cabins belonging to a mining plant which had probably been abandoned because of the unsettled condition of the country; if indeed, the owners had not been actually driven out of it. The band numbered from a hundred and fifty to two hundred men, but as some of these were continually on the road plying their fascinating vocation, the cabins held most of the others. Some children playing about on the edge of the stream argued at least a degree of permanency to the camp, while several women appeared in the doorways of the cabins, manifesting an interest in the gringo prisoner.

"Not much of a life for womenfolks," thought Dave, pityingly. "They look pretty well disgusted and discouraged. Women have a lot more sense than men, anyhow. You'd never find a woman breaking up her comfortable home and tearing

around the country, burning and looting, but a man will fall for it every time. All right, amigo, I'll get off if you say so, and you can do just what you please with that pinto; he's no kin of mine."

The cavalcade had drawn up before one of the cabins and two of the men went inside. The rest dismounted and turned their horses loose. Some boys who had been playing about led the strange horses toward a corral at the upper end of the canyon, while the others followed, dragging their bridle reins in the dust. Dave seated himself on a comfortable looking stone and lighted a cigarette. It struck him as being a bit odd that nothing had been taken from him except his firearms and the knives he had himself taken from Ortega and Baca. As for these worthies, they gave every evidence of being as doubtful of their future treatment as was the American. He gave up the problem with a shrug and devoted himself to the cigarette.

At this moment the two Mexicans came out again and beckoned to José Baca and Juan Ortega to enter.

"Boss is going to find out who I am and what was José's little game," chuckled Dave. After about ten minutes the two came out, looking sullen and ugly. The interview had evidently not been to their taste. They had been given the freedom of the camp, however, without doubt, because they

strolled over to one of the other cabins and joined a group of men who were sitting and smoking in the doorway. One of the Mexicans who spoke English gave Dave a shove with his foot.

"Go in," he said. "The General wish to see you." Dave rose, threw away the cigarette and entered the cabin. It was rather a large cabin, three rooms at least, so the airman's quick glance told him. He entered the nearest one because he saw a man sitting at a table, reading—reading the *New York Tribune,* as a hurried and amazed look informed him.

Jimenez, himself, did not suggest the desperado. He was short, stout, and middle-aged, and he looked rather like a prosperous, good-natured Latin gentleman, who had strayed into the haunts of crime on an investigating committee. His black hair was heavily tinged with gray and his beard, which was neatly trimmed, gave him an appearance of dignity. He wore no uniform but khaki riding trousers with puttees, a dark coat, and, to Dave's delight, a silk shirt.

"None of your low down, out at the elbow, hungry-looking greaser about His Nobs," he reflected. "Ten to one his English is better than mine."

So it was, allowing for a slight accent, although a precisian might not have allowed its claim to purity on that account.

"So!" he said, as Dave entered, "you are an American airman, eh? Sit down." Jimenez spoke with decision and he had a quick black eye which belied any possibility of a too easy-going nature which his physical make-up might suggest.

"On the job every minute!" thought Dave, admiringly. "No fuss or excitement but knows just where everybody is without any time clock, I'll bet. Keeps them hopping, too. Yes, General, that's what I claim to be," he said, taking a seat.

"You have a permit to travel in our country?"

"No, I haven't. I rather thought that fellow, José Baca, might have told you the circumstances."

"He might, Señor, but I like my information at first hand. I am what you in your great country call a 'business man.'"

"Well, if that's the case, General, the sooner you see me safely over the border the better business it will be for you and your friends," replied Dave, quietly.

"How much better?" The General smiled pleasantly. "To be exact, how high a value does your government put upon your services?"

"Well, they've never given me enough to get out and go into business for myself," grinned Dave, "but then again they've never starved me, either. You see, General, I'm not the only little aviator they've got."

"I see that you are a humorist, like so many of your countrymen," smiled Jimenez. "I admire all your great humorists from Mark Twain to George Cohan."

"You're broad-minded like myself. Yes, humor is a handy thing to have these days."

"Exactly. Now if your President ——"

"Hold on!" Dave's voice was firm. "I'm an American, and we don't discuss our President with the neighbors. We'll talk about yours if you like."

Jimenez made a wry face. "Unfortunately, he does not interest me sufficiently. Let us talk about you, Señor. Why did you cross the border? To spy upon us?"

"No," replied Dave, thoughtfully. "My business was rounding up some deserters on our side of the line. I crossed by mistake. It would have been better for us all if I hadn't."

"So?"

"Yes. It's not going to help you, this getting in bad with the United States. I suppose you're hinting at a ransom?"

"I had thought of it."

"It won't work, General."

"It does, as a rule."

"Yes, but that sort of thing isn't going to last much longer."

"I hear you say so!"

"Well, I know it sounds foolish," admitted Dave, "but it's true. We're not a military lot over on our side, and most of us don't want to have to come over here and clean you out. We don't think it's a square deal for the fellows over here who want peace and a comfortable place to live. Just the same, some day you chaps are going just a bit too far, just a step, and something's going to bust up."

"And it is your idea that making a prisoner of you may be that step, eh?"

"Well, no, I don't figure I'm that important; still, you can't tell what will do it. I'm an Irishman, you know, and there's a lot of us over there. We pull a big vote. Anyhow, supposing I did precipitate an expedition? It would about finish your business, wouldn't it?"

"Not necessarily. It might upset the Federal Government, in which case there would be a chance for all."

"You're not exactly a patriot, General, are you?"

"What encouragement is there in this country to be a patriot?" bitterly. "Madero, Huerta, Carranza, Villa—bah! Since Diaz what have we? Huerta had strength, he might have made it, who can tell? But you would not let us have him. Well, I have Felipe Jimenez, Señor, and I find that he treats me very well."

"I get you, General. You're a business man, as you say."

"Exactly. Twice I have had fortunes, Señor, and twice lost them. Once with my plantations in the South, once with mines. Both I lost because of the revolution. Now I make one for myself and if your country sees fit to come over and interfere—well, it cannot harm the fortune. It is not in land or mines this time."

"That's all right, General, but don't talk about ransoms because it's foolishness."

"Why? Your Government—your friends ——"

"My Government and my friends won't pay it because I won't ask them to, sabe?" Dave's face grew ugly. "If they want to come over and scrap for me, all right. But I won't be a party to one single dollar's being sent over here to swell that third fortune of yours. I'm an American and I don't like that way of doing things. Do you get me?" and Dave thumped angrily on the table.

"A moment ago you were an Irishman, Señor."

"Well, I'm an Irishman when things go all right, but I'm an American when I'm mad. There's a lot more at home like me. If you don't believe me, ask Foch." And Dave swallowed angrily. "Now that we understand each other, what are you going to do?"

"Frankly, Señor, I don't know. I never do

things in a hurry. You shall not be obliged to ask for your ransom, however; I will attend to that myself. You are too modest and I am afraid you will not put the price high enough. Pablo!"

"In the meantime I suppose you'll send the War Department a chunk of my ear just to show that you're in earnest!" snarled Dave, as Pablo entered.

Jimenez chuckled. "My dear young man, you are thinking of Francisco Villa. I was educated at Harvard College, so let us have no idle chatter about ears. But, at the same time," the suave voice hardened, "if you undertake to leave this camp and I catch you, I will have you shot in just exactly five minutes. Do you understand?"

Dave grunted.

"Then do not make the attempt. I find you very good company for a rather uncultured man and I have no desire to have you shot. Pablo, take the Americano to your cabin and give him food. See that he does not escape you. If he does, you and your family will suffer."

"Si, General, but what are we to do with the men who brought him here?"

"Let them go. They are Parral's men," and he turned to his paper again.

"Well, I may be an uncultured man," chuckled Dave as he followed Pablo out, "but if you aren't

the newest thing in bandits that I've seen, I'm a Dutchman! Educated at Harvard, reads the New York paper, keeping up on the stock market, I suppose, and talks English like a professor. Well, if I get out of this alive, I'll have a good one to tell the boys when I get back to San Antone."

Pablo Mendez' cabin was smaller and much less orderly than the quarters of the General, and Pablo's wife, a good-looking woman, with a sharp eye, was preparing a supper of frijoles, chili con carne, and tortillas, as the two men entered. Dave remembered the meagre fare of the Baca family and did not wonder at the ease with which the poor Mexican drifts into outlawry. It was considerably better than starving on a goat ranch. A couple of men lounged in the doorway and gave way with stares of curiosity as the American entered.

No one seemed to know very much English, but they all chattered Spanish at a speed which made Dave helpless. Now and then he would grasp a few sentences, get a clue to the conversation, then it would be swept away in a flood of incomprehensible Latin sounds. Baca and Ortega arrived in time for the meal and took a small part in the conversation which soon became hilarious. The words "Jimenez" and "Parral" occurred often and it seemed to Dave that the bandits were ridiculing Baca and Ortega about something. He set himself

to comprehend, and finally managed to grasp an idea of what they were talking about.

Pablo and his friends seemed to be rallying the other two for having perforce delivered their prisoner to the wrong bandit. A flood of light came to the American. That was it, of course! José Baca had relations of a business nature with a bandit by the name of Parral, to whom he and Ortega had tried to sell the Americano. Their plan had been frustrated first by Dave's own action in refusing to keep to the trail, and secondly by Jimenez' men who had arrived in time to take things into their own hands. Consequently, Baca and Ortega had their trouble for nothing.

"Baca's hot about it, too," concluded Dave. "He's not in a position to say what he thinks, but he'd like to put a knife into Pablo between the shoulders. I wonder if I could work on him to get word over the border for me? If I could get the mutt alone——"

This, apparently, was one of the things that Pablo and his friends did not intend to allow. During supper and afterward there was always someone between Dave and José Baca. Ortega, who was a silent soul and sat in a corner, smoking, was also under supervision.

"He's smart, that Jimenez," thought the American. "No fuss or frills or movie stuff, just a

regular business man like he said. They sure run true to form, your real smart business men, don't matter whether they're handling stocks and bonds in Wall Street, or running an outlaw joint in Mexico. I've seen eyes just like this chap's back East, and they were always in heads that knew their business and weren't worryin' themselves thin over the other fellow, either. If he puts his mind on that ransom, he'll get it or he'll know why. Shucks, I wish I could beat him to it! I could, too, if I could get five minutes alone with that loafer over on that bench. A couple of planes with guns could drop down on this little hole and have me out in five minutes. If they take it up with Washington, it means asking permission of Carranza to come over, and I'll grow stiff while they're fighting it out."

Finally, it seemed as if the chance had come. José's arm needed re-bandaging, and the wife of Pablo undertook to do it. There are women who have the knack of such things, just as there are women who can always put a cross baby to sleep, but it is a gift and not a sex law. Juanita tried the bandage one way and then another with equally bad luck. One of the men laughed and the woman's black eyes snapped angrily. With an Irishman's quick wit, Dave rose quickly.

"Let me do it, Señora," he said; "your pretty hands are too small for such things. See, this is

how we arrange a bandage in our country." He seized the bandage and adjusted it deftly; then, under cover of the laugh that rose at Juanita's expense, he said hurriedly in English:

"I want to see you alone before you go. Manage it and there's fifty dollars in it for you."

José's dark face flushed. "Si," he said, in a whisper. "If I can, but they watch all times."

That was all. Dave returned to his seat, and, apparently, to his thoughts.

"Ortega and I will start before sunrise," José said to Pablo, in Spanish, but slowly, as though to enable the American to comprehend. "It is cooler so."

"It is all one to me," nodded Pablo. "The General says you are free. Me, I am sorry that you lose your money. What do you think Parral would have paid you for the gringo pig?"

"Quien sabe? A good slice of the ransom, perhaps. Parral is generous."

"So is our General, generous but severe. Each of us has a share of what the band takes."

"The General's share being the fattest, eh?" said Baca, sourly.

"To be sure. Why not? He is a man of brains, none of your common bandits. He already has a fortune in the bank in New York," replied Pablo, proudly.

"In New York! Why in New York?

"Because he has a wife, amigo, who is a fine lady and lives there. You have noticed the fine guns we carry? She manages that. She is a clever woman."

"Well," remarked Baca, with a sneer, "that is all very fine, but for me I prefer to sail under my own flag. No rich Generals to slide over the border with the money when the game is up and leave me to be hanged by the Government."

"Well, ain't José the regular little parlor Bolshevik?" commented Dave, admiringly. "Anybody that's getting up in the world gets right on his nerves. Guess I'd better horn in before he gets this Pablo party all riled up. See here, amigo," he began, "where do you figure to put me for the night? It's getting mighty near my bedtime."

This simple question had more than the desired effect. It not only broke up the discussion with José, but it precipitated one between Pablo and the two men who had been assigned by him to do guard duty over the American for the night. Pablo, having been made responsible for the prisoner, proposed to keep him in his own cabin, while the other two held that prisoners had always been kept either in an old cabin down by the corral, or in the General's own shack, and they saw no reason for changing the custom, especially as the General, and his

lieutenant, Cordoba, had left camp before dark and might not return before daylight.

The question was debated hotly and Pablo, not having a positive order from headquarters to support him, lost out. The two guards rose and motioned to the American to follow them. Dave, decidedly relieved at the result of the quarrel, for he believed that his chance of further communication with Baca would be much greater in the other cabin, followed them submissively. The room was at the rear of the General's shack and was meagrely furnished, but like everything in Jimenez' neighborhood, it was clean.

"Bet the old bird puts up at the Biltmore when he visits New York," he thought, with a grin. "Say, fellows, leave me the lamp, will you?" he said, as the two prepared to leave him.

"No. The las' prisoner he try burn down ze shack," replied one of them, tersely, and Dave heard the door bolted on the other side as they left him in the darkness. He went to the window and looked out. The moon was just beginning to rise and he could see one of the neighboring cabins. It would have been an easy matter to drop from the window, but the two guards had stationed themselves outside under a small tree some ten yards away and had evidently the intention of remaining there all night. He looked at his watch; the phos-

phorescent face showed ten o'clock. He took out his electric torch, which had escaped the searchers for firearms, and, seating himself on the edge of the cot, got out his notebook and pencil, writing with difficulty as a man does who is not used to expressing his thoughts on paper.

"It's just a chance, and an awful poor one at that, but I'll take it," he said, and then wrote as follows:

DEAR POSTMISTRESS:

This is from the chap that you gave the pie to last Friday; remember? I'm in bad hands, having had an accident that lost me my plane and threw me into the clutches of a bunch of bandits under one Felipe Jimenez. He's thinking just now of holding me for a ransom, if he don't change his mind and shoot me before breakfast.

I don't want any ransoms paid for me, but if you could get word to Colonel Hastings, at San Antonio, and get him to let a couple of the boys slide over the line before daylight some morning, instead of taking it up officially with Washington, they could snake me out of here and nobody be the wiser. These fellows would die of fright if they saw a machine gun pointed at them from a plane that meant business.

The Colonel's a good sport and don't like red tape any more than I do, and you're smart enough to put it up to him or I'm a duffer. I've drawn you a sort of map to show you where I think I am.

Of course, if the Federal Government gets hold of this, they'll try to prove that I was over here on scouting business and that will put a wrench in the machinery. So you get busy like a good girl and do what you can for me. I'm trusting this to a chocolate-colored son of a gun that can't read English but says he knows you—one Baca by name, and here's hoping he'll make it. Adios!

Yours respectfully,
DAVE SULLIVAN.

So saying, the writer folded the letter and pinned to it ten crisp five dollar bills. Then he lay down and waited—the rest was up to José Baca.

CHAPTER IX

MIDNIGHT CALLERS

It was some hours later when Dave woke suddenly to the sound of voices in the next room. He sat up, realizing with furious disgust that he had slept—slept, and probably missed Baca, if indeed the latter had tried to communicate with him. He glanced at his watch; nearly four o'clock! Well, he had been a fool. The next thing to do would be to destroy the letter, in case he was searched. He would give Baca another hour and then —— The sound of the voices silenced his thoughts. There seemed to be four men there and two of them spoke English, good plain Texas English. The other two were Jimenez and Cordoba, the lieutenant who led the party which captured Dave. The voice of Jimenez came through the flimsy partition sharp and clear:

"You are quite private here, Señors; no one stays in this cabin except myself and occasionally a prisoner of war. To-night the prisoner is elsewhere. A light, Miguel, if you please!"

Dave heard a match struck and saw a line of

light shine under the doorway. Then a different voice said:

"All right, General, we get you, but there's no use takin' the whole crowd in on this. I suppose this chap of yours can hold his tongue?"

"You can depend upon Cordoba as upon me," replied Jimenez. "You will smoke, Señor Sanders? And you, Señor ——"

"Rogers," came in a drawl from another man. "I s'pose he'd regret it if he didn't hold it, General, but at the same time shootin' him wouldn't help us much when the Sheriff dropped in on us and wanted to know what we done with those machine guns. We don't hanker fer no publicity on this deal."

"Naturally, and there will be none. Now, let us have the thing straight. I understand that these five soldiers have deserted from the army, carrying off some machine guns and a quantity of ammunition with them?"

"They was out drilling with a sergeant and they slugged him. Stole his uniform, put it on one of themselves, grabbed a hand car and fanned it down the line to somewheres between Three Rocks and Mesa," replied Sanders, tersely. "Nobody stopped 'em because of the sergeant's uniform, and by the time the real sergeant had come to, these boys and the guns was hid in a cave somewheres near Mesa.

Then they gets word to some friends to get 'em some civvies and to hide 'em in a better place."

"That better place being Texas Park, I suppose?"

"Not on your life, it ain't!" replied Sanders, promptly. "I won't deny, Jimenez, that I've helped you to a bit of horseflesh or beef when you needed it, but I ain't meddlin' with no army business. Texas Park has got a bad enough name now without plantin' stolen machine guns there."

"Well, if you haven't got the guns, what do you want with me? What's the game?"

"We ain't got the guns, but we know where they are, which you don't. Pay us and we'll see that you do know."

"Why don't these men make their own bargain?" demanded the Mexican.

"Why, General, you ain't usin' your common sense," Rogers broke in with a laugh. "A fine bargain they'd make once they was in your hands! They're prize boneheads but they've got sense enough to see that. Besides, they don't know the country. They've got to trust us."

"And you sell them to me!" Jimenez' voice was cool and cutting.

"Why not?" cut in Sanders. "They're crooks, ain't they? Deserting from the army and stealing

army stuff? They'd ought to be thankful to get out with their skins whole. You know our price, and you don't have to ask anybody's leave to pay it, so we can settle up this affair to-night. I don't want to come over again if I can help it. Things are gettin' warm on the other side."

"Why should I pay you for what I can take myself?" demanded Jimenez, calmly.

"Because you can't take 'em yourself. You don't know where they are and you ain't going to have time to comb the country for 'em when you get over. Times has changed since 1916."

"You mean ——"

"I mean," retorted Sanders, "that it's got to be a dash over and back. They're watching the border these days. Villa pulled it off at Columbus, but you ain't Villa, and, besides, they're wise to the game now. A lucky dash over and back and nobody on our side the wiser is what you want."

"That's the idea," drawled Rogers. "We can't afford to get caught in a business of this kind; it would mean Leavenworth for us. But for you, General, it's as safe as a church. Come up through the Gap, say about next Friday or Saturday, when the moon's full; the place ain't fifteen miles from the border and a decent trail most of the way. With good horses you can be back by daylight. If you do meet a patrol ——"

"Thank you," responded Jimenez, drily, "I think I know what to do should I be so unlucky as to meet a patrol, but where is the place?"

"Hand over the money and I'll show you in five seconds on that big map of yours," said Sanders.

At this, the voice of Cordoba broke in in Spanish.

"Why," he demanded, "should we pay, General? They are here, two among many. Why not force them to give us this information?"

"Exactly. Have you Spanish enough to see the point, Sanders?" asked Jimenez, evidently not unwilling to prolong the discussion in order to think with his usual deliberation.

"Sure I see it," was the reply. "I seen it before I come over. If you want to bust up your system of getting stuff over, why go ahead. Of course you know we ain't the only guys in Texas Park who are on to your little game, and you might make trouble for your Missus in New York."

"You have your answer, Miguel. We play fair," chuckled Jimenez.

"Sure you'll play fair and so will we," replied Sanders, easily. "Give us the money in a check on the bank your Missus keeps your cash in and if the deal goes wrong you can stop payment. It ain't that I mean to do you any dirt, Jimenez, but I've never mixed up with any government stuff and I don't

mean to begin. A man's got a right to sell his live stock where he wants to and if he chooses to smuggle it over on the quiet, that's his business, but deserting soldiers and machine guns is another piece of goods altogether."

"I understand." There was a pause. Dave wondered if Jimenez was making out the check. He marveled at the man's assurance; a bank account and a wife, probably both under an assumed name, hidden away among New York's millions, and now defying the Government under the nose of one of its border patrols!

"Only, of course, the old geezer doesn't know that the nose is in this room, and the chances are that when he finds out, he's going to make it blamed uncomfortable for that same nose! I've got to get out of here somehow."

"There, Señors, is your check. Now, kindly make that location clear," said Jimenez, and Dave heard them move to the other end of the room, where he remembered having seen a large map of Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. To his disgust he could hear very little, a few exclamations, and Jimenez' "One moment! Write that. You comprehend, Cordoba?" and the lieutenant's gruff, "Si, I onderstan', but if ze soldiers fin' zeze men biffore we get there?" Cordoba evidently being a bit of a pessimist.

"I tell you," growled Sanders, "them soldiers couldn't find that place in a year. It's an old cattle rustler's den, ain't been used since the old days. I stumbled on it when I was out after cattle or I'd never have seen it. Besides, you know soldiers! After they've hunted a few days and ain't found them they're going to give up and that's the time for you to come over. Why, I——" He paused. Outside a dog barked suddenly and angrily, and Dave heard a horse dash madly past the cabin. Someone yelled an oath in Spanish, and one of the men in the next room crossed quickly and threw open the outer door. The rest followed, and Dave heard Sanders' voice say angrily: "That fool horse of mine been scared off! I'll——" and the sound of his voice died away.

Relieved of the fear of being heard in the next room, Dave sprang to the window. The moon was coming up and except for the shadowy blot cast by the cabin, the surrounding space was fairly light. The thing which made the prisoner's heart leap suddenly was the discovery that the two guards were no longer under the tree. Without doubt they had run to capture the flying horse. There was but one thing to do, and being a good American, Dave did it instantly. Putting one hand on the window ledge, he vaulted over it and into the dark shadow cast by the cabin. To his horror, he landed

upon the body of a man who was crouching underneath the window.

"Señor!" gasped the man, as Dave grasped him by the throat. "Señor, I am José Baca—do not strangle ——"

Dave's grasp relaxed. "Baca! You haven't gone!"

"No. I creep into the shadow when the horse escape ——" It was evident that José was badly frightened. His teeth chattered and Dave realized perfectly that only the lure of the promised dollars had secured him. Fifty dollars are fifty dollars, and fifty American dollars in Mexico are even more alluring than in their home atmosphere. Dave thought quickly. José's chance of getting across the border was better than his, and the Colonel must know of the proposed raid—for Dave felt quite sure that the expedition would not stop at machine guns. Recklessly he flashed the light of his little torch upon the letter and the bills.

"I want you to take this to the post-office in Angus," he said. "Give it to Miss Phelps. You know her—the kids said you did. She—well—she's my girl, and I want her to know where I am."

"No, no, Señor!" José's voice was panic-stricken. "No one can cross without papers! No one ——"

"You can. Either you or that lame brother of yours can slide over in the night ——"

"Si. My brother he mignt ——" José's eye had caught the green of the bills.

"If he does the job well there may be another fifty."

José shuddered. He knew quite well that Carlos often crossed the border on business less innocent than delivering a love letter and one hundred dollars was far more than Parral would have given him for turning Dave over to him, though in talking to Jimenez' men he had bragged of his generosity. Finally desire overcame fear.

"Give me the letter. I will try," he whispered.

"Wait a second. That chap's chasing a horse; he won't be back just yet," and Dave scribbled hastily on the last page of the letter: "Sanders—Rogers—Texas Park—machine guns hid there—Jimenez will raid probably Friday or Saturday." Then he crammed note and money into José's eager hands. "Got your horses here?" he said.

"No. They not let us go in the corral. I go now to ask for them," and wrenching himself from Dave's detaining hand, José glided around the corner of the cabin like a badly scared snake.

"No use asking that one to help me out," mused Dave, "I've got to manage this getaway myself.

Well, here goes! If they shoot, they shoot; if I stay here old Jimenez will shoot me anyhow after what I've heard."

As he crouched in the shadow, Dave could hear the exclamations which marked the end of the search. He must not be found here, and yet where could he go in that moonlit expanse? Moving to the edge of the shadow, he cast a desperate glance into the surrounding space. The sound of the little stream hurling itself down the rocky bed came through the stillness. Its banks, some twenty or thirty yards back of the cabins, lined with rocks and mesquite, might afford a temporary shelter. It was a risk, for a flying prisoner in a Mexican camp is usually despatched in short order if discovered, but on the other hand, the fate which would await the man who had spied on the midnight councils of a quartette like the late occupants of the cabin, would be hardly more enviable.

"It's up to me to beat it," decided Dave, simply. "If I don't run, they may not spot me."

It took all the nerve he had to saunter across the moonlit space, past the cabin where the guard had been stationed, and, without even a quick glance over his shoulder, to walk slowly down to the river bank, kneel down and drink from his hands, but Dave managed it. Each minute seemed an hour. His mind heard bullets at every step, but he

reached the river safely, and as he crouched behind a rock, he saw the guard hand over the captured horse to Sanders, and go back to his post, lighting the inevitable cigarette as he went. Evidently the two were relieving each other on guard, for he saw only one.

"There's one fellow who's going to tell himself to-morrow that it don't pay to be too blamed polite," chuckled the prisoner. "And now I guess my best play is to get down to the corral and see what I can do about getting hold of the pinto. If I can't fan it out of here before daylight I'm going to get into trouble with a certain business man of my acquaintance."

Still crouching and with infinite care he advanced along the edge of the river, scantily sheltered by the rocky banks, his feet in the water most of the time, slipping and sliding, but taking what precaution he could against noise. He had noticed while waiting outside Jimenez' headquarters the direction in which the boys had led the horses, and he now followed it, till a sudden bend in the river after about a quarter of a mile showed him that he must again come out into the open.

"I ought to be mighty near the corral," he figured, "and it's ten to one they don't keep a guard over the horses when they're at home. These chaps aren't much on discipline, and probably most of the

horses are out at pasture, anyhow. I'm playing in luck this trip."

Dave was right in thinking that there would not be many horses in the corral, horse-feed being an important item even with bandits, consequently only eight or ten were dozing around the enclosure. At one end of it was a small covered shed in which the equipment was kept. Locating the pinto was not difficult. He, in company with two other horses—they looked like the ones Baca and Ortega had ridden—stood in one corner of the corral near a wooden watering trough. Dave crept softly up to the pinto and laid one hand on his mane. He did not jump away. So far things were moving very well. Then he noticed with a start that on the ground near the horses lay a saddle, bridle and blanket. Dave recognized the saddle as the one which José Baca had ridden; a broken tapidero recalled itself to him the moment his eye fell upon it. What it was doing on the ground was not at all clear; surely not even a Mexican would leave a good saddle on the ground to be trampled upon by the horses.

"It's not likely, either, that Baca laid it out for me," Dave reflected with a grin, "but I'm going to take it just the same." He picked up the bridle and was coaxing the bit between the pinto's teeth, when he heard a jingling—like that of a curb chain.

He turned and saw a man moving about in the shed. He held a bridle in his hand and seemed to be looking for something. Dave dropped to the ground, quick as a flash, and wriggled himself behind the watering trough. The man's back was toward him, but he cursed his stupidity at not having made sure that the corral was empty. Someone was saddling the horses of Baca and Ortega and had gone to get the second saddle. If it was Baca, himself, things were not so bad; but it probably was not. It was most unlikely that the two strangers would be given the freedom of the corral even to saddle their own horses; it would be altogether too easy to walk off with some that did not belong to them.

Presently the man came out of the shed with the paraphernalia for the other horse on his shoulder. He was whistling as he came, and he was neither Baca nor Ortega. In fact, he was none other than Pablo, who was attending to the details of departure for Baca and Ortega, himself. Pablo's mind was not at ease. He was certain that Jimenez had intended the Americano to be kept in Pablo's own quarters. He had allowed himself to be persuaded otherwise and had spent the night in vain regrets. He had no particular fear of the prisoner's escaping, because he believed the cabin to be well guarded; but Jimenez was a man who expected his

orders to be obeyed with absolute literalness. Also, he had a system of punishment for those who offended him which revolted the soul of Pablo. He did not hang, burn, or torture, but he levied on the pocketbook, a deadly and dastardly thing to do, thought the Mexican. He had not a doubt that the General, arriving with the two strangers—Pablo did not know who they were, and shrewdly suspected that he was not intended to—would be exceedingly angry at the presence of the Americano in his cabin, and he would take an early opportunity to make things very unpleasant for the responsible parties. Consequently he did not intend to incur more punishment by taking any chances with Baca or Ortega. Anyone, reasoned Pablo, would steal horses, given the opportunity, and he did not intend that the two should have that opportunity.

He saddled the horse belonging to Baca, and then approached the other, bridle in hand. Dave, lying prone in the shadow of the watering trough, began to hope that he was going after all to escape notice. Pablo lifted the bridle with one hand and placed the other on the animal's head. The horse threw its head up and dodged away from the bridle. Pablo, with an oath, raised his hand angrily, but before he could strike, the horse drew its ears back and buried its teeth in his coat sleeve so close to the flesh that Pablo stepped backward, tripped over the

trough and lit on the prostrate body of the hidden Americano.

For a second both were too stunned for action; then Dave, realizing his peril, struck savagely at the Mexican's head. He missed, and received a stinging blow on his own. Then they closed, and, gripping each other tightly, rolled over and over like two dogs. They were well matched both in strength and in temper. The Mexican was armed, but had no chance to use either gun or knife, for Dave's grip was an iron one. Both had skill and endurance. Back and forth they rolled, snarling and swearing; the horses, frightened, dashed across the corral. Dave felt the Mexican's hands on his throat; the grasp tightened; he drew his breath sobbingly. In desperation, he loosened his own grasp, struck furiously with right fist at the other's jaw, while with his left he reached for the gun in the Mexican's belt. He felt the choking grip relax a trifle. In another moment he would have the weapon.

Suddenly, the sound of voices and hurrying footsteps came from without the corral. Pablo uttered a hoarse yell which was answered by another. They were coming—damn 'em—but he'd give that greaser something to remember him by before he quit. He lunged furiously at the brown face so near his and in another moment the men had seized

him and pulled him off the gasping Pablo, setting him on his feet again. The two glared at each other, then Pablo, with a shrug of his shoulders, muttered, as he nursed a bleeding nose, "Bring him to my cabin. Don't let him fight, he is like seven devils. And you two"—with a scowl at Baca and Ortega, who stood near watching the affair, "get out of here—now—you understand? Take your horses and go!"

The two Mexicans obeyed in silence and not by a look or a sign did José Baca betray the fact that fifty good American dollars, for value to be received, rested safely in the pocket of his dirty coat.

"You hit the trail as hard as you can, old boy," murmured Dave wistfully, as he followed his captors out of the corral. "Well, I played safe and I'm glad I did. It's up to you, now, little lady at Angus!"

CHAPTER X

JIM ROGERS

THE days immediately succeeding the Angus party's return from the barbecue, found the "Prince of Wales," as Georgia loved to call Alec Stanley, in a much improved state of mind and body.

"As a sick man, you are an awful fake," she told him as they came up the walk, one morning. The target practice for the day was just over, as was shown by the presence of Georgia's little revolver in its neat holster at her waist line. "When I look at you, I realize what people mean when they talk about an 'interesting invalid.'"

"It's the company," replied the young man, with a grin. "If you'd been over there I wouldn't have lost the arm."

"Well, who knows? Maybe you wouldn't," put in Mrs. Patterson, from an open window. "Those army surgeons are mighty keen on the cut and saw, I've heard. Many's the man who'd have been better off for having a sensible woman around."

The two young people sat down on the top step of the veranda.

"That woman," volunteered Captain Crowder, who had returned from the barbecue with them and had been visiting ever since, "puts me in mind of Mis' Hopkins, who lived at Lobo when we had the boom."

"That was in '86," contributed Mr. Jeff, from the depths of his easy chair.

"'86 nothin'!" contradicted the warlike Captain. "It was in '84. I remember well enough because I kep' post-office in Lobo that winter and was livin' next door to the Hopkinses. Mis' Hopkins was one o' them dominatin' women; never seen her scared but once. They hed a daughter, about fifteen; right pretty lookin' gal, sort of like Georgy, here, with yaller hair an' blue eyes;" the Captain paused and drew a meditative breath.

"Yes, yes, go on," complied Alec, cheerfully. "Did you fall in love with her, Captain?"

"I did not, young feller. I ain't never been one to waste my time on women—I got sense."

"So has the women," breathed Mr. Jeff.

"Huh? Ain't it a queer thing how deef folks always either whispers or yells? Ever notice it?"

"Often," said Alec, "but what happened to the young girl aged fifteen? She appeals to me strangely."

"That was her trouble," replied the narrator. "She appealed to all the menfolks. There was a feller come to board with the Hopkinses, an' he fell in love with Beulah. He was old enough to be her pa, and when it hits 'em at that age it shore lays 'em out. Well, the Hopkinses didn't like it an' said so, an' I guess th' gal didn't more than half know her own mind; but, one day the feller took a gun and walked into th' kitchen where the family was eating breakfast, and shot old Hopkins in the windpipe without so much as 'by your leave.' Then he went for the womenfolks, but they'd run. The gal hid in the woodshed, an' Mis' Hopkins run out of the front door and started over toward my house, yellin' like a White Mountain Apache.

"The feller run after her an' fired at her, jest as I come out of my door, but she kep' on runnin' an' yellin'. I run out and grabbed her and started carryin' her back to my place, that idiot keepin' on pepperin' us all the time in the most dangerous kind of a way. All of a sudden, she stiffened out in my arms and died, all in a minute, so I laid her down and run. Her doin' that is the only reason I'm here to-day, for I naturally wasn't goin' to leave her while she had breath in her. Them was stirrin' days, them boom days in Lobo."

"What happened to the girl? Did he marry

her?" inquired Alec, a bit dazed at this matter-of-fact relation of a tragedy.

"He did not. He was waited on by a committee of influential citizens of Lobo about fifteen minutes later, and put where he couldn't do no more harm —leastwise not with guns," replied the Captain, calmly. "Beulah, she married a drummer who come down from El Paso the next year."

"Captain Crowder," said Georgia, rising indignantly, "I think you know the most horrible stories of anybody around here! What with 'Billy, the Kid,' and ——"

"There wasn't nothing horrible about Billy, exceptin' when he was lookin' at you over a gun," said the Captain, comfortably. "He was as nice and pleasant spoken a youngster as this feller, here. He didn't look unlike him, neither—quite a resemblance."

"Well, I like Caspar Freund's stories about Lobo the best," declared the girl.

"Wal, mebbe so, but mine's true."

"Why, Captain! You know Caspar's bandit story is true," exclaimed Georgia, indignantly.

"Mebbe so, Georgy, but I never heard nobody but Caspar tell it."

"Was it about Villa?" demanded the guest, with interest.

"Mercy, no! It was back in the boom days at

Lobo, same as the Captain's. They were a wild lot in Lobo then, to hear them tell it!" Georgia's eye met the Captain's unflinchingly.

"So we was," chuckled that gentleman, reminiscently, "almost as wild as them movies you kin see down in El Paso. Only, of course, we had some sense."

"Well, Caspar had, anyhow," continued Georgia. "He kept a little store, one of those General Merchandise stores where they sell everything from shoes to gumdrops. One night, it was in winter and rather cold, Caspar was sitting back of his counter going over his books. The counter was just an old kitchen table with a drawer in it where he kept his cash box.

"There had been several hold-ups in town and people laid them to one man, but nobody knew who he was. You know how it is in small towns, people like to know things. Everybody went armed pretty much in those days, but Caspar didn't even have a gun in the house. He says he's afraid of them. Well, that night, while he was sitting there, the door opened and someone came in. Caspar looked up suddenly and there stood a tall man with a black mask on. He came up to the counter, aimed an awful looking six shooter at Caspar and demanded the money in the drawer!

"Caspar knew then that he was being held up,

for the first time in his life. It was an awfully queer feeling, he says. He reached down as if he was going to pull out the drawer, but instead of that he ducked down between the legs of the table and grabbed the hold-up man by his legs, pulled him under the counter and sat down on him. The man was so surprised that the gun flew out of his hand and went off and shot Caspar's pet cat on the end of the tail.

"By this time, Caspar said that everything was so awful, with the room full of smoke and the cat going perfectly wild, that the man seemed to be stunned, so Caspar said, in his funny, German way:

"'My friend, I don't know who you are, but you and me iss both amateurs in dis hold-up business, so ve vill stop it right off,' so he pulled the mask off the man's face, and it was one of his neighbors, a very nice young fellow who had been unlucky and had started to go to the bad."

"Started?" remarked Alec, grimly. "I should think he'd gone pretty far."

"Well, he hadn't killed anybody like Captain Crowder's man, so Caspar told him he could have a job working in the store till he'd earned enough money to go home. Caspar said he didn't think he was cut out for a Western man, somehow."

"I reckon that yarn's true enough," remarked Mr. Jeff, thoughtfully. "The Germans is crafty

and I seen that cat. He didn't have no end to his tail."

"I seen the young man," said the Captain, scornfully. "He went to El Paso and got a job in a candy store. It was him that married Beulah Hopkins."

"Well, I'm glad you admit that it's true," replied Goergia, as she went into the house to get some feed to take up to Mrs. Patterson's chickens. She loved the walk up to the mill and she loved the little cabin, tucked in among the hills, amid the absolute solitude. At home, indoors, you sometimes forgot the mountains and the sunshine, but the tiny shack wasn't a house. You weren't tempted to stay in it. You were always outside with the chickens, looking up at the brown and green mountains, and thanking God for having sent you there to live, instead of cooping you up in a city. That is, if you were not Mrs. Patterson. That lady may have thanked her Maker for some of His gifts, but it is safe to say that she never mentioned the shack to Him unless it was in terms of reproach.

"Isn't it funny how she hates it all and how I love it?" Georgia said, as she tossed the grain to the chickens. "Now, that will do, Pancho Villa!" she continued, angrily, as the rooster sailed into the corn regardless of his hungry family. "Try to remember that you have wives and children and don't

crowd all the food into yourself. Oh, I hope you choke for that, kicking that poor chicken out of the way. I don't care if you were expensive, I despise you!"

"Mornin', Miss George!" The girl turned quickly, hearing the voice and the noise of hoofs on the loose stones at the same moment. A young man, riding a buckskin horse and leading a bay mare, came up the road from the Company House. Georgia smiled; her smile was for the bay mare, but young Mr. Rogers did not know this, so her "Good-morning, Jim," was not unpleasing to his ear. He was a tall, fair-haired young man, thin and muscular, with the burned skin and lazy drawl of the born Texan. He rode up to the girl's side and dismounted.

"I brought you over the mare," he said, smiling ingratiatingly down into her eyes. "The boys said you rode her over to the barbecue and liked her. Thought mebbe you'd like to keep her a spell befo' you bought her."

"Well, I would. I like her a lot, but I don't know whether Father'd want me to buy a horse when he wasn't home," and Georgia patted the bay's neck lovingly.

"That's all right. Keep her till he comes home an' try her. She'll make you one fine little ridin' hoss when she gets over her foolishness." Then

with an amused glance at the revolver which was still in her belt, "Goin' heeled these days, eh? Scared of bandits?"

Georgia laughed and explained the reason for the weapon. Mr. Rogers' face indicated, however, that he was not interested in one-armed soldiers. They started to walk down the hill, leading the horses.

"Whose is she, Jim? Yours or Phil Sanders'?" asked the girl.

"Phil's. If she was mine, I reckon I'd be givin' her to you, not sellin' her, Miss George." There was a mixture of boldness and shyness in the man's manner which sat oddly on him, but the girl was, or pretended to be, unconscious of it.

"I don't want anyone to give me horses," she said, coolly. "But you might show me how to make a bargain with Mr. Sanders. Captain Crowder says he'd skin his own mother on a horse deal."

"How come you all are so set against Phil Sanders? Pap says it's scandalous the way the neighborhood talks about us folks over in Texas Park." There was a twinkle in Mr. Rogers' gray eye as he uttered this innocent remark. Georgia stiffened a bit.

"I guess you know why," she said, righteously. "We've heard things we don't like about you, that's why."

"About us? Come now, Miss George, what have you heard?"

"Oh, nothing definite, just hints. Border deals, for instance."

"Wal, ain't a man got a right to sell his beef where he wants to?"

"Beef! I'm not talking about beef, I'm talking about guns and ammunition and—oh, you know what I mean! I suppose you've got those deserters and their machine guns safely over by this time, haven't you?"

"Deserters!" Jim Rogers' calm was shaken. The word came from him like a stone from a sling, but his recovery was good. "What do you mean by deserters?" he said, in a hurt tone.

"Oh, I read in an El Paso paper about their getting away," replied the girl, loftily. "And there was an airman scouting around after them the other day, too."

"You don't say!" the young man's amazement was genuine and unstudied. "Wal, I ain't smuggled them over. I give you my word on that, Miss George."

"I'm glad of it. I'd hate to think that a man who'd carried my books to school would do that sort of thing," declared Georgia, pleasantly. Her conscience hinted that she had been a little quick at jumping at conclusions. Jim did not answer at

once. When he did, it was with the same mixture of boldness and shyness that had marked his manner a few minutes before.

"Seems kind of long ago, those days, don't they?"

"Thousands of years ago!" declared Georgia, promptly. "That funny little schoolhouse at Lobo, and all of us going there on our burros!" She spoke laughingly, but her heart misgave her. There was no doubt in her mind as to what Jim Rogers was getting ready to say; it wasn't his first attempt at saying it, and she did wish he wouldn't. Quite apart from its inappropriateness in connection with a horse deal, it was not pleasant to be on bad terms with the Rogers family; they were so numerous, so talkative, so intermixed with the life and politics of the community, that one did not willingly set them against one.

"Seems like we've known each other quite a while," went on the persistent Jim. "Most long enough for me to give you a hoss if I wanted to." Then, suddenly, looking into her eyes boldly: "I'm going to pick me out a ranch over near Three Rocks."

"Why, how fine, Jim! Where did ——" Georgia stopped and blushed.

"Where'd I get the money, I s'pose you mean? Wal, I ain't buying, I'm homesteading. I'm saving

my money to build a fancy cabin, and stock up with some good cattle. Then all I'll need is a wife." This last with an attempt at jocularity.

"Oh, I see!" Would they never get down that hill, Georgia wondered? "I'm glad to hear it, Jim, and I hope you and Sarah will be awfully happy."

"You know well enough I ain't marryin' Sarah."

"I—I heard you'd made it up, and I was so glad," lied Georgia, lamely.

"I ain't marryin' anybody unless you'll have me, and you know it." To Georgia's surprise, the man's face had grown tense—almost hard; there was a nervous glitter in his eyes that she had never seen there before. Lazy, good-for-nothing Jim Rogers was showing himself in a new guise. "I'll make money for you, girl, more than you'll ever get out of that mine. You shan't regret it." He drew closer as she shrank away.

"Oh, no, no, good gracious, Jim, what are you thinking about? Of course I don't want to marry you, or anybody else. I wouldn't marry the King of England if he asked me at this time in the morning, anyhow. Please!" For the admiring suitor's arm was around her waist and his timidity had vanished altogether. They were a good five minutes' walk from the Company House and Georgia suddenly remembered sundry hints which she had heard apropos of Jim Rogers in the past. "Now,

Jim, don't be ridiculous, please!" she pleaded. "I don't like it and I won't have it."

"You can't help a fellow's telling you he likes you!" His arm tightened its grasp, his face came closer. Georgia lost temper, tact and self-control at one bound.

"Oh, can't I!" With a quick gesture, she took the little revolver from its holster and thrust it into the face so close to hers. The young man withdrew the face instantly and the two stood, glaring at each other for a moment in silence. Then Georgia replaced the little weapon in her belt and Jim laughed uneasily.

"My God, Miss George, you wasn't aiming to shoot, was you?"

"I don't know whether I was or not," replied the girl. "It's not loaded, anyhow, so it wouldn't have mattered. I don't like you any better, Jim, for making me feel like a fool, so don't do it again, please." There was a coolness in her tone that showed the young man that the moment of panic was over, and his opportunity with it.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, half embarrassed, half amused, in spite of himself—the deadly weapon was so small and the spirit of the girl so big. "I didn't mean to be rough, but I guess I lost my head. I've been thinkin' a lot about you lately, and ——"

"Don't think about me any more, please! Oh,

yes, you can help it—you've known me since I was eight and it's only since you broke off with Sarah that you've been thinking about me." Georgia's words were cold, but there was a friendly twinkle in her eyes. The young man didn't answer for a moment, then he drawled:

"I don't know whether that's so, Miss George, or whether I've been thinkin' of you ever since you was eight, and just fell in with Sarah by chance. These things are queer and we can't explain them even to ourselves, I reckon, but you can put up your little gun. You won't have to use it on me. I'll send you a real one if you'll let me."

"Oh, this one seems to do pretty well!" drily.

"Wal, of course you did startle me some," admitted Rogers, sheepishly. "A man don't want even a little gun in his eye, you know." Then, with an evident desire to change the subject: "I wish you'd let me put your saddle on the mare so's you could try her while I'm here. She'll make a good ridin' hoss for a woman—ain't many men have got the patience to handle her right—she's awful high strung. My sister Nell's rode her with the baby in her lap, but I've seen her pitch Sanders over a barbed wire fence."

"I don't think Phil Sanders is nearly as good a rider as you, Jim," said Georgia, glad of the change of subject.

"Phil's right smart with hosses but he's careless. You can't afford to be careless with hosses. I broke a lot for the Gov'ment when I was in camp, and I don't take no chances. You ride with your knees too loose; I s'pose it's from ridin' that old plug of yours, Beaver. This mare'll do you a heap of good."

They found that Mrs. Patterson had dinner ready when they reached the Company House, so deferred the ride till later. Mrs. Patterson opposed it vigorously. She didn't like Jim Rogers and she didn't like strange horses and some day Georgia would wish she'd listened to her friends. But Georgia's self-esteem was still smarting from the incident of the morning and she didn't propose that Jim Rogers should think she was afraid of him.

* * * * * * * * *

The mare proved as good as Rogers had promised. She had a light, springy trot that was blissful to one who had been nourished on Beaver's slow plodding and Snap's heavy-footed gait. Georgia, being a good horsewoman, was not loath to avail herself of the hints which Rogers gave her as to the handling of the animal.

"You'll maybe ride her for days without a hitch," he said, "then some day—look out! She's greased lightning and whatever she does, she'll do quick.

Better not put that one-armed doughboy of yours on her unless you want him killed."

"Your father said he rode very well," replied Georgia, coolly, as they turned into the road to Mesa.

"Wal, Pap don't know much about hosses; mules is more in his line," was the reply. "Hey, look out for her!"

Before the words could reach the girl's ear, the mare had made a lightning-like jump to the left and cleared the narrow road in one movement. Georgia's knees braced themselves mechanically and to her great relief prevented the worst from occurring. The next moment, she saw that Rogers had dismounted and was standing by the side of something that had frightened the horse. It was a man's body, lying at the side of the road, in a strange and dreadful position, face downward, the head bent almost under the shoulders. In a moment, the girl was off her horse and at his side.

"Oh!" she cried, in terror. "Is—is he dead?"

"'Pears to be," said Rogers, drily. "Looks like his horse had stepped in that prairie dog hole yonder and threw him. Neck's broke, I reckon. Prob'ly happened in the night."

Georgia felt a sick and clammy feeling at the sight of the helpless body which Rogers handled so carelessly. She had seen very little of death and

the thought of it was horrible to her. Then, as she saw the face, another cry escaped her.

"Why, Jim, it's Carlos Baca, Anita Baca's husband, don't you remember? The family that lives down near Mocking Bird Gap, and has those little boys?"

"Sure enough. What's he doing over here, I wonder? Horse gone home, I s'pose."

"What will that poor woman do? All those children, and nobody to help her! That brother of Carlos' is no good at all; I've heard that he was running with the bandits."

"Wal, she'll get along like the rest of 'em, I guess. Let's see if he's got anything on him to show what he's doing over here." Rogers fell on his knees beside the dead man and felt hurriedly in the pockets of his shabby coat and trousers. There was only the usual litter of small things, tobacco, cigarette papers, some Mexican money, matches. Rogers put them back with something like relief in his face. Then he examined the dead man's boots, much to Georgia's amazement. Nothing to indicate what had lured Carlos across the line.

"We'll have to go on to Mesa, I reckon, and tell them about this," he said, rising. "There'll have to be an inquest."

Georgia nodded; her thoughts were still with the dead man's family.

"I'll see the Padre, while we're there," she said. "He'll find a way to let poor Anita know."

Mr. Rogers' meditations were of a slightly different order.

"What's that guy doin' over her right now? If he's got a message from Jimenez, it ain't on him. I don't like the looks of it. That airman, too, that she was talking about. If he's got wind of—pshaw, he couldn't find 'em in a year! All the same, I reckon it's me for a cast iron alibi for Friday night."

Once arrived at Mesa, a few minutes sufficed to make the manner of the accident clear; their depositions were taken by the sheriff, and the business was over. Georgia declined the offer of Rogers to accompany her home. She wasn't afraid of the mare and she wanted to be alone. Rogers acquiesced more easily than she had hoped for. His mind was still disturbed by the accident of Carlos Baca, whose presence this side the line called for an explanation. Rogers felt quite certain that the explanation offered by his own uneasy nerves was not the right one. There was nothing as far as he knew to connect the dead Mexican with Jimenez and the deserters, still, he felt uncomfortable and was not loath to return to Texas Park to talk the matter over with Sanders.

"Mebbe I'll be over to see you along about Friday

night, Miss George," he ventured, "to find out how the mare's treatin' you."

"No," replied the girl, firmly, "I don't think I'll be home Friday night. I'm thinking of making a visit of a few days about that time. I'll let you know about the mare, and I'm ever so much obliged for her." And being quite unable to stay disagreeably firm for very long, she shook hands and rode away before she was tempted to relent any further.

As she rode she continued to think of the Baca family. Anita's people had been Mexicans of good standing in Mesa. Her father had been employed by the Mining Company. At one time, during a disturbance made by a crowd of drunken miners, he had stood by Georgia's father and had practically saved his life. Everyone had been surprised that Anita had been willing to marry into a family so little respected as the Bacas, and, to tell the truth, if she must marry one of them, that she had not chosen José, who had at least a spice of wickedness about him. Lame Carlos had seemed decidedly an anticlimax for good-looking Anita Morales.

Since the old people had died, the family at Angus had seen little of the Bacas. Mocking Bird Gap had been one of the places where one went occasionally to camp in the hunting season. One sometimes got a deer in the mountains thereabout and there were no rangers to enforce uncomfortable

laws in case one got several. The terrors of guerilla warfare had been longer in reaching Sonora than its neighboring state, and Georgia had been over once or twice since the war. Of late, however, such trips had been given up, and though she often thought of Anita and the little boys and wondered how they were faring, she had heard very little of them, and now came this horrible thing!

It was a very sober Georgia who rode into the corral, attended to the needs of the bay mare, and then crossed the road to the house. In her face was a look of decision which boded ill to the comfort of her temporary family. They were all on the veranda waiting for the mail; Mrs. Patterson sewing busily, the two old men puffing at their pipes, and Alec Stanley dozing over a magazine. They looked so very peaceful and comfortable that Georgia's heart smote her to think of throwing a bomb into their midst, so, being Georgia, she went at it at once in order to get it over.

"We've had a dreadful adventure," she said; "we found Carlos Baca lying dead in the road about a mile from Mesa. His horse must have stepped in a hole and thrown him."

"Carlos Baca dead! Good land, whatever will happen to those youngsters?" Mrs. Patterson gasped, while the two old men looked their astonishment. A firm look came into Georgia's eyes.

"I am going to slip over the border and bring those boys back with me," she said, quietly.

"Have you got a passport to cross the line?" demanded Mr. Jeff, quite rapidly for him.

"No. I've been over before without a passport and I guess I can go again. I don't want to start any talk about it and I want to get those children before José Baca hears of Carlos' death, if I can."

"I don't know who Carlos Baca is, but I think you've gone off your head," remarked Alec, politely. "I never heard of such an utterly mad proceeding."

"Now, Georgia Phelps, what call have you got to meddle with another woman's children, I'd like to know?" demanded Mrs. Patterson, bitterly.

"Please, don't all have a fit!" continued Georgia, smiling; "I've thought it all out. Anita Baca's father saved my father's life once, and the poor old man would turn over in his grave if he knew that those little boys were going to be left to José Baca. Anita and the big boy can manage, but those little fellows need a home and somebody to look after them. I'm not afraid to go alone—that is not much afraid," she finished, honestly.

"Well, you shan't go alone." Alec was fired by the girl's courage. "I'm not much account, but I can fire a gun and I'll be company for you in jail

when the Immigration fellows nab you. When do we start?"

"Look here, young man!" Captain Crowder's voice was wrathful. "I'm going with this youngster, myself. It's a fool business—there ain't none of them greasers wuth it—but she's made up her mind and that settles it. I can't help her goin' but I kin help the two of you goin' and scandalizin' the neighborhood while her Pa's away. You kin stay here and help Mrs. P. run the post-office."

"We'll start to-morrow morning, Captain," said Georgia, sweetly. "I rather thought you wouldn't let anything like this get away from you. It'll be just like the boom days in Lobo."

CHAPTER XI

GEORGIA'S SCRAPE

It would be idle to say that some of the first, fine, careless rapture had not worn off of Georgia's adventure before she and Captain Crowder came in sight of their camping place by evening of the first day out. Temperamental people who undertake heroic deeds when the sun shines and their courage is high, are apt to feel some of this glow depart as twilight's shadows fall. What had seemed a natural and necessary undertaking when leaving a pessimistic Mrs. Patterson and an outraged Alec Stanley, was beginning to look like another of what her mother called "Georgia's fool scrapes."

The Captain's spirits, however, had risen with each hour of the journey. He had insisted upon going along because, while he knew perfectly well that the scheme was a wild one, he believed that there was a possibility of his being able to keep the worst from happening. Once embarked upon an adventure, the Captain always began to feel ten years younger, and no one can feel ten years

younger without experiencing some pleasure. The eight hour ride, on a hot day, over rough trails, reminded him of the old cattle days, and he hobbled the horses, built the camp fire and made a bed of pine boughs for Georgia, with great briskness, singing in a cracked voice snatches of song which dated back to a much more remote period than that of the boom days in Lobo.

"We've been very lucky, getting past Mesa and Texas Park without meeting anybody and being asked questions," said Georgia, as they ate their supper, the legs of a rabbit, shot, after several attempts by Georgia, and cooked appetizingly by the Captain, whose equipment included pepper and salt, a lard pail and some coffee.

"It ain't luck, it's sense," replied that gentleman, crossly, for to be happy did not with him always mean to be complacent. "I ain't meant for us to meet anybody. We ain't out on law abidin' business, Georgy, and fort'nately I know more back door trails in this country than anybody but an Injun. We ain't goin' to meet nobody if I can help it."

"You don't think we're doing anything really wrong?" Georgia's voice trembled a little. "I'm not going to bring them back unless their mother is willing. I'm not kidnapping them."

"We're smugglin', that's about the size of it.

Smugglin' ourselves over and them boys back. If either the fiscal guards or the immigration folks was to ketch us they'd have a word to say to us, but there's wuss things than smugglin'. There's stealin' and killin' and ——"

"Oh, Captain!"

"Wal, I'm jest givin' you my idee."

"If we get caught ——"

"If I thought we'd git caught, I wouldn't go—that's all," replied the Captain, sharply. "Give us ord'nary luck and we'll snake them little greasers over so easy that they won't know what ails them. Now, you roll yourself up in your blankets and get some sleep, because I'm going to rout you out at four o'clock. We're jest a few miles from the line and before daylight's an awful good time to cross it. I know a trail leadin' down to Baca's place that's so rotten bad that nobody but a fool would try to ride it."

Georgia rolled herself up obediently in the blankets but failed to follow the second instruction. Her mind would go over the events of the last two weeks, do what she would to stop thinking. So many new elements had come into her usually uneventful existence—Alec Stanley, with his sunny disposition and his fits of despondency, the unknown girl in New York to whom she had sent a letter, Dave Sullivan and his airship, Jim Rogers and his rough

courtship, the tragedy of yesterday—no, she wouldn't let herself think of that! She would think of Dave Sullivan, if she must think; she wondered if he had succeeded in his errand. He looked like a man who did what he undertook to do. He wasn't as good looking as Alec Stanley, and he had very little more polish than Jim Rogers, but there was something about him that inspired confidence and stimulated interest—Georgia would have said curiosity—but interest is nearer what she felt for Dave Sullivan. She rather hoped he would come by Angus again some day; it would be interesting to hear more about flying in France. Just about this time the tired body conquered and Georgia slept, the sleep of the just, not that of the smuggler.

In the meantime, things had been happening down at Carlos Baca's ranch. The Padre at Mesa with the kind intention of breaking the bad news as gently as possible had written a letter to Anita Baca, and the letter had arrived with more than usual quickness, owing to the fact that a neighbor, Maria Ortega, had been in Capitan with a load of wood and had brought it back with her to the bereaved widow. The letter, however, had been forestalled. Carlos' black horse, Chico, a sagacious and home-loving animal, able to travel by trails instead of rails, had arrived at the ranch the night before, his bridle reins hanging on the pommel of

the saddle just as they had caught when Carlos fell, tempting the animal, as hanging reins would not have done, to leave his master and go home.

As Chico traveled, he carried with him in a tiny saddle pocket the letter written by Dave Sullivan to Georgia Phelps, and dispatched by José, care of Carlos. José probably would have pocketed the fifty dollars and torn up the letter, had it not been for a quite natural desire to throw a monkey wrench into the machinery of General Jimenez' plans. José couldn't read the letter very well, but Carlos and Anita had managed to figure out most of it between them, and the chance to spoil Jimenez' game with the machine guns and a possible raid was too good to lose. It was reasonably safe, too. Carlos, who often slipped over the border, could hand the letter to someone, a child, perhaps, and thus insure its being taken to Georgia. Carlos and José, like most primitive people, had a very poor opinion of the improvements of civilization. A letter sent by hand might be slower than one put in a mail box, but its chances of ultimate arrival looked much more promising to them.

After Carlos had gone, José had a season of regret. He might have taken the letter to Parral. Parral would have paid him something for a chance to intercept four machine guns, and probably much other loot which Jimenez would collect on the other

side. On the other hand, José's connection with Parral was known to Jimenez, and Jimenez' revenge might be prompt and unpleasant. After all, he had not done so badly. He had told Carlos that the airman had given him twenty-five dollars, so Carlos had been satisfied with ten as his share. All things considered, José had done a good day's work.

So it was Chico and not the Padre's letter who broke the bad news to Anita and the little boys, the baby and the small brown dog. Anita knew at once that something dreadful had happened to Carlos. Very likely he had been shot by an enemy and was lying dead in one of those lonesome canyons where she would never find him, and the enemy would probably come and drive Anita and the little boys off the ranch. The Padre's letter, spelled out with difficulty by both Anita and Maria, was almost in the nature of a relief. At least, Carlos would receive Christian burial, and there was no enemy, except José, who would probably grab everything that he could. After an hour, during which they had all, including Maria, wept wildly and with every possible gesture of utter abandonment, Anita had ceased weeping and had sent the two boys into the mountains after their older brother. He was now the man of the house, was Pedro, in spite of his fourteen years, and he would have to assume his obligations.

GEORGIA'S SCRAPE

Georgia and Captain Crowder came down out of the mountains and made their way by trails which fully justified the old man's description of them to a little eminence about a hundred yards from Baca's cabin. They paused to look over the situation before going on.

"We don't want to run into José," Georgia said. "He'd sell us to the nearest bandit for ten dollars a head."

"He would if he dast," agreed the Captain, "but I doubt if he'd dast," he added with touching optimism.

"I'd hate to risk him. What's that queer looking thing in the trees? It looks like a smashed airship—but it can't be," remarked the girl, viewing the remains of "Maria" with some curiosity.

"So it does; let's go down and see," said the Captain, starting his horse down the slope.

There was no one in sight except a small youngster, who rolled in the dirt outside the cabin door, and played violently with a brown dog.

"I might have known there'd be a new baby by this time," mused Georgia. "I suppose I'll have to smuggle the whole family over, including the pup!"

Anita came to the door, and, recognizing them, came running to them, crying excitedly, the tears, it must be admitted, not being entirely those of grief.

Carlos had been a good husband according to a rather loose standard; that is, he had not beaten her or run away and left her to starve; but he had drunk more than was good for him and had been a harsh and hard man, and undoubtedly, if they didn't starve or fall into the hands of bandits, Anita and the little boys would be better off without him than with him. Therefore, she must be pardoned if she wept largely from happiness at seeing again the friends of past days.

"Yes, yes, Anita, we know all about it," said Georgia, soothingly. "I was the one who found poor Carlos. What? Say it slowly—I don't understand." For Anita was babbling excitedly. "What's she saying, Captain, about Carlos coming to see me?"

"Suppose we go up to the house and set down," proposed the Captain, dismounting. "José around anywhere, Señora?"

No, José was not around. He was seldom around except when he wanted something of Carlos. It was José who had sent Carlos on that last unlucky errand with the letter to the Señorita Phelps. Surely the Señorita had the letter?

"No, I haven't had it," replied Georgia, wide-eyed. "What in the world was José Baca writing letters to me for? I didn't suppose he could write."

"No, no, not José—the gringo—the airsheep

man! He who is prisoner to the bandits! He write it and pay José to take it."

"The airship man!" Georgia stared at Anita in genuine amazement.

"Si—si! The sweetheart of the Señorita—so he tell José."

Georgia's cheeks flushed scarlet. "I think you're crazy, Anita!" she said, angrily. "I don't know what you mean. Carlos was dead when we found him and nobody gave me any letter about anything."

"Then it ees still in zat saddle pocket w'ere I put it!" and Anita ran out of the house.

"Do you think she's gone out of her head with grief?" demanded Georgia, in astonishment.

"I don't think anybody'd go out of their head with grief over Carlos Baca," answered the Captain, placidly. "I didn't know you had a beau in the aviation, Georgy," he added, with a grin.

"I haven't! I don't know any airmen—except one—and he——" Georgia eyed the Captain in horror. "Captain, do you suppose that *was* an airship that we saw out there and that——" but Anita came running in with something in her hand, and Georgia stopped.

"Read, Señorita!" she said, putting a crumpled bit of paper into Georgia's hand. "The airsheep man he say for his sweetheart!"

Georgia unfolded the letter angrily. Someone was trying to play a silly joke on her, she concluded. She recalled Dave Sullivan's mocking expression and told herself that this would be just the sort of thing that such a man would do—and yet, that broken machine out in the Baca orchard—well, she would read and see. As she read, her face changed; an expression of horror fell from her lips. She did not doubt the truth of the letter, there was something about it that carried conviction, and the last words, scratched with such haste in the darkness as to be almost illegible, brought a thrill of terror to the heart of the Western girl who knew what they might mean. She thrust it quickly into the Captain's hands.

"Read it! Oh, what can we do!"

The Captain read the letter slowly. "I don't jest seem to get the feller's drift, Georgy," he said. "Who is he and what does he mean by ——"

Impatiently, Georgia told what she knew of Dave Sullivan. "He must have crossed the line without knowing it, and fallen into their hands. Is that his airship out there in your orchard, Anita?"

Anita, evidently frightened, muttered something about "José" and "Jimenez," and picking up a pail of scraps, fled to the pig, to escape further questions.

"There's something crooked about this business,"

said the Captain. "It looks to me like this José Baca'd had a hand in getting this chap into the bandit's clutches, but if he did, why in thunder does he carry letters for him? Bandit didn't pay him enough, prob'ly. Anyhow, you won't get nothing more out of that woman; she's scared."

"Oh, Captain, they may have shot that poor fellow by this time!" Georgia's face was white.

"Not them! A live aviator is wuth a heap more than a dead one to a Mexican bandit," replied the Captain, drily.

"Oh, why didn't I get the letter before we started! I could have called San Antonio ——"

"Now, Georgy, you shet up for a few minutes and let me think. Fidgetty womenfolks always gets on my nerves. I'm going to find a way out of this, but you got to give me time to think."

Georgia, meek for once, sat down on the doorstep. She felt sick and frightened. Gone was the remembrance of Dave Sullivan's mocking laugh; gone was her anger at the thought of his having told José Baca that she was his sweetheart. She remembered only that an American soldier was in trouble and had cried to her for help—help not only for himself, but for all those others who must suffer if Jimenez' raid took place.

Georgia knew what Mexican raids were. She knew, also, how unprepared the average border

town is to meet a sudden onslaught. She had, as every border dweller has, the details of dozens of outrages at her finger tips. He had trusted to her to find a way to save him and those others. She could not help a feeling of pride at the thought. She visualized the face of the man, with its keen blue eyes, stiff underjaw, and sandy hair. Then, suddenly, she remembered that it had been a full week since the day she had met him up in the pasture; the letter was undated, but it must have been written at least five days ago; what might not have happened in that time?

"It looks to me, Georgy," said the Captain, coming out of his meditation, abruptly, "as if the sooner you and me got back to God's country, and prodded Uncle Sam, the sooner that boy'd get out of Jimenez' hands. We can't do nothin' from this side."

"But the Federal Government? They'd have to do something, if we went to them and told them about it!" cried the girl. "There are Federal troops in Capitan ——"

"'Twouldn't do no good. If this young feller was a Britisher, or a Frenchman, or a Jap, we might work that dodge; but an American an' a Chinaman are the two things these boys ain't one bit afraid of, and there you are!"

"It's a shame ——"

"No, sir. Gettin' him out while we're in is too much like a feller that can't swim trying to git another feller out of the water. I want my feet on good old U. S. ground before I begin rubbin' these here Mexicans' fur the wrong way. Here's where you and me hit the trail as soon as them horses of ours has had a rest. What d'you reckon he means by that postscript, anyhow?"

"He means that Sanders and Rogers have got those deserters and their guns hid somewhere, and that Jimenez is coming over to get them, and loot a town or two—Carrizo, probably, while he's there," replied Georgia, promptly.

"That don't sound right," mused the old man. "Why don't Phil Sanders an' Jim Rogers rustle them soldiers and guns over themselves some dark night?"

"They're probably afraid to mix up in army business," said Georgia.

"Wal, mebbe so. Many's the man that would ruther some other man drug his chestnuts outen the fire," said the Captain; then, as Anita Baca entered the house, "Wal, Señora, suppose you tell us just what you know about this business, anyhow."

Anita, however, was beginning to think that she had talked enough. Fear of José Baca rose again in her mind. Yes, the airman had spent the night

in her cabin, after his plane had been ruined, about a week ago. He had gone away with José and a neighbor. José had come back a few days later and had paid Carlos to take the letter to the American girl. He had said that the gringo had fallen into the hands of bandits. That was all she knew. One did not ask questions of a man like José Baca; one was afraid of him.

"Anita, that's why we came over when we knew Carlos was dead," said Georgia, gently. "I wanted to take the two little boys back with me and look after them till things were settled down here. You know how badly your father would have felt about their being brought up by a man like José."

Anita burst into tears. The young lady was an angel! Gladly would she have sent Juan and Luis ——

"Wal, we can't take 'em now," said the Captain, decidedly. "We got to start back as soon as we can. You can write to the Padre and have him fix it up to have 'em got over regular. It'll take time, but it can't be helped. Now, I'll turn them horses of ours into your corral and give 'em a feed. We'll give 'em three hours to rest and then they'll have to move."

While they rested, Anita produced food and babbled unceasingly of her grief at Carlos' untimely end, and her fear of José, who would probably

claim the ranch and the goats and leave her to starve with her babies. Georgia, trying to talk hopefully, but feeling very downhearted herself, played with the baby and the brown dog, and wondered what Dave Sullivan was doing. He had begun to occupy her mind in a manner altogether astonishing to her. She had not thought of Alec Stanley once since reading the letter.

It was nearly five o'clock when they started on their homeward trail. "I don't like the looks of the sky, Georgy," said the Captain. "I thought the rainy season was over, but we're goin' to have a storm. We'll put our slickers on before we start. Anything I hate is to be foolin' around with a slicker after the storm's busted." So, enveloped in yellow oilcloth to their chins, the old man and the girl took the trail.

"I feel different, oh, so different, from the way I did when we started," Georgia said. "Then, I was all excited and feeling like an adventure, and yet we didn't have any adventures at all coming over. It was as tame as going to town. Now, that something has happened, I don't feel excited at all; I feel just plain scared. It's because so much depends on us, I suppose. If we did fall into the hands of bandits, what would become of Dave Sullivan and who would stop that raid?"

"Wal," replied the Captain, "I ain't figurin' to

do much for this feller, Sullivan. Jimenez'll get a ransom out of him, I reckon, if he's got any friends to pay it. But if we can save guns an' ammunition from fallin' into these chaps' hands, we may be savin' American lives for all we know; and, as for a raid, I seen a Mexican raid once, and I seen a party of Apaches that got off the Reservation and started to burn and plunder, and believe me there wa'n't much to choose between them for deviltry. If Jimenez is plannin' to raid, he's got to be stopped, that's all. I wouldn't give much for Sullivan's chances, if Jimenez finds out who give him away, though."

"Oh, Captain!"

"Wal, that's the chance he's takin' by doin' his duty. He knows it. If that Colonel of his takes his advice he may save him, but he won't. Army men have to obey orders, an' orders is ginerally 'Don't.'"

Georgia did not answer. She felt very helpless and unhappy. It hurt her to think that such things could happen. It hurt her to know that her country was so deeply hated by its ignorant neighbors, and its vengeance so thoroughly despised. It hurt her to think that a man whom she had known and liked—yes, she was sure, now, that she had liked Dave Sullivan, even if he had laughed at her—could be in such fearful peril. It is all very well

to read of such outrages, and to shake one's head and murmur, "Horrible! Why don't they stop those things?" It is quite another thing to know the victim, and to know that he is looking to you for help, and that there is very little that you can do for him.

In the meantime, the Captain's weather prediction was being verified. The rainy season evidently meant to prolong itself by means of one of those sudden and terrific storms which occur frequently in the Southwest. Rain fell in torrents. It dashed itself into their eyes, it made a river of the trail; the horses, scared by the thunder and lightning, slipped and slid over the stones and through the mud.

"I don't like that mare of yours, Georgy!" yelled the Captain, trying to make himself heard above the noise of the storm and the struggling horses. "She's an awful fool with her feet. Air you keepin' dry?"

"Yes," said Georgia. She wasn't keeping dry because the neck of her slicker wasn't properly fastened and rivers were pouring down it from her hat while she struggled with it. The mare did slip and slide more than any mountain-bred horse has a right to, in spite of her being new to the feel of shoes, and Georgia envied the Captain his old sorrel with the safe and solid tread of an elephant.

The trail grew worse every minute. On either side, the brush grew close against it and flung showers of water in their faces every time it touched them. Most of the time they could not see the ground ahead of them and had to trust to their horses entirely. In the case of one as frivolous minded as the bay mare, this was not comfortable. Whenever the lightning flashed, she jumped. If it happened to be on a smooth place in the trail, she came down stiffly and jarringly on four feet; if not, she slipped and struggled and slid till she found a footing; all of which, added to the fact that it was beginning to grow dark, began to get on Georgia's nerves. She was cold, too, and wet through. Suddenly the Captain, who was leading, stopped and turned.

"Georgy, I don't like having you out in this," he said; "there's a trail over yonder that leads to a cave—I uster know it years ago—shall we hunt it up? It'll be dark in a couple of hours."

"How far are we from the Gap?"

"Oh, we'd ought to make it in an hour and a half, if we don't stop. If we stop, we'll have to wait till morning. I wouldn't risk this here trail after dark, not with that fool you're ridin'."

"Then let's keep on. We can't spare the time." Georgia's teeth were chattering, but she spoke firmly.

"Wal, I reckon that's sense, but I hate for you to be gettin' so cold."

"Never mind me. Go on." They went on a few rods in the blinding rain.

"Look out! This here's a bad place," the Captain called, as his horse made a sudden descent, plunging down into an arroyo which had filled with water, which came as high as the stirrup, swirling, reddish water, rushing down from a cloudburst up in the mountains. The mare, whose nerves were rapidly getting the better of a constitution none too well balanced, paused half-way down, gathered herself together, and jumped. She jumped it short about a foot, and scrambled and clawed her way up the slimy, stony bank, made it finally, emerging, covered with mud, and, after a few steps, lame in her left fore leg.

"It's her shoulder. She's wrenched it bad, th' durn fool!" growled the Captain, angrily. He had dismounted and was feeling of the mare's leg. "Wal, try her for a bit. Mebbe she'll make it and mebbe she won't." But the animal continuing to limp more and more painfully, he made the girl mount the sorrel, while he led the way on foot, leading the bay. This did not work very well, either. The Captain, like most men who ride a good deal, was not a good walker. Indeed, his slippings and scramblings resembled those of the

mare very noticeably. After he had fallen three or four times, and picked himself up, muttering strangely, the girl insisted upon mounting the mare and retracing their way to the trail which the Captain was quite sure led to the cave.

With much trouble the mare was coaxed through the arroyo again and they struck off to the right. Then came another hour of slipping, sliding, coaxing unwilling horses, and striving against cold and fatigue. The trail, in the meantime, was widening and becoming a little easier to travel.

"Are you sure this is where your cave is?" ventured Georgia, as they did not seem to be arriving at a stopping place.

"Sure? Of course I'm sure. D'you think I'm losing my memory?" spluttered the Captain, "or do you suppose they've moved it?"

It was, however, quite evident that something was wrong. Either they were on the wrong trail, or the cave was much further away than the Captain's memory had told him.

"Oh, dear, what are we going to do?" thought the girl, desperately. "He's lost and he won't admit it, and this poor horse is so lame that I can't bear to urge her another step! As for me, I think I'm going to shake myself to death, I'm so cold. Oh, how I wish —— My goodness, Captain," she called suddenly, "there's something ahead that

looks like a cabin! That dark shape over to the right."

The Captain stopped and stared. There was a dark mass over in the direction toward which the girl pointed—there was just light enough to see it, not to distinguish its identity.

"It looks to me like a tent," said the Captain, slowly.

"It looks to me like Heaven!" said Georgia. "Oh, do let's go there, that's a dear!"

"Wal, all right. It's mighty risky; we dunno who the parties is, but you got to take some chances in this world," replied the old man. "Can you push that skate of yours a little further?"

Georgia thought she could. For herself, she was so cold and miserable that she would have made for the tent if she had known that Jimenez himself was in it. It was a tent, and as they approached it they were able to distinguish the outlines of a corral not far from it. At the same time, a vigilant dog lifted his voice in protest at their coming. They stopped, but no one came out of the tent. The dog continued to bark, but remained unseen.

"What do you think is the matter? Nobody there?"

"Looks that way." The Captain dismounted, and pushing the flap of the tent aside, looked within. "Not a soul inside. Get down. I'll take

the horses and put 'em under that shed in the corral; it's a goat corral. We're in luck."

"Look out for the dog!" Georgia cried, fearfully. The dog, a large one, had bounded from the corral and was running toward them. The Captain raised his revolver threateningly, but the girl stopped him suddenly, just as the dog reached them. "Captain, that's Anita's dog, the one I gave her! Max! Here, Max! See, he knows me, and that's the collar I gave them, too. Good dog, you do know Georgia, don't you?"

"By gum, if we ain't run into Baca's goat ranch!" declared the Captain, as the dog returned Georgia's greetings, a little warily, at first, then with real dog-like cordiality.

The tent, to which Georgia repaired, leaving the Captain to attend to the horses, was not altogether uncomfortable. It served as a habitation for whoever was guarding the goats, and so was furnished with a lantern, a small stove, and a bed of pine boughs, covered with blankets and quilts. Just at present, the floor was soggy with rain that had run under the tent, but when Georgia had lit the lantern, and started a fire in the stove with some pine cones and bits of wood from a box near by, it was not uncheerful, at least to one who had been out in the storm. The Captain returning found her seated in the middle of the bed, drying her boots.

She had taken down her hair which was wet, and had the air of one at home. He seated himself beside her; it was, in fact, the only place to sit.

"It ain't raining as hard as it was," he began, "but that mare of yours is pretty bad; she don't look to me like travelin' again in the morning."

"Oh!"

"I been thinkin'——" The Captain paused and eyed the girl reflectively.

"Yes?"

"If we're goin' to help that chap one of us has got to start away from here in a couple of hours. The rain's stoppin' and the moon's comin' out. If that hoss of mine would carry double, we'd make it together, but he won't. Which'll you do? Ride him and go on alone? Or stay here whilst I go, and trust to me gettin' back for you? I'm leavin' it to you to say."

Georgia gasped. "Captain, are you sure he won't carry us both?"

"Sartin sure. Besides, I'm pretty heavy and the roads is bad. Whoever goes must make time; ought to be across in a couple of hours. It's a reckless thing, travelin' them trails by moonlight, but it's got to be done."

Georgia was silent. She was thinking and thinking hard. Finally, she said:

"Captain, you go and I'll stay. You know the way and you'll make it if anyone can."

"Good for you, girl, that's what I hoped you'd say. I couldn't think of you ridin' round alone in this country at night; the hoss might take you right, and agin he mightn't, and there's no knowin' who you'd meet. You can stay here till some of the boys from Baca's come in the morning, and tomorrow night you can get Pedro to bring you over on the burro; that's better than waitin' for me to come for you. Don't you stir out of here in daylight. Are you afraid?"

Georgia smiled in spite of herself. "Afraid? Of course I'm afraid, but I'll do it. It's the only thing to do. And now I'll make you some coffee before you go."

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH VICTORIA ACTS

THE same evening that found Georgia bidding the Captain farewell in the goatherd's tent, found Victoria Dunlap doing what was for her a most unusual thing. She was dining alone. To begin with, she was not often in New York in August, but she had come up from Newport, to attend to the closing of a war industry shop in which she was interested. Most of her friends were out of town; her father was in Washington on business; hence Victoria had the unusual pleasure of dining alone in the big apartment on the Drive, and of sitting alone after dinner, and, as she sometimes put it, "catching up with her mind."

Victoria had Ephraim H.'s kind of mind; the type that is always ahead of the game; the restless, exploring, scheming sort of mind, which keeps the poor body unlucky enough to be attached to it continually on the jump. Not that she suggested this sort of thing in her appearance, quite the other way. Victoria was a little woman, slim and beautifully made, with a childlike face, in which were set two big, dark, innocent looking eyes. Her

glossy black hair, falling away from her face in rather severe waves, after the prevailing fashion, emphasized the childishness of appearance; you were reminded of the way little girls used to roll their hair tightly back and fasten it with round combs. A clear, olive skin, pretty teeth, and graceful eyebrows completed an exquisite face, ludicrously un-indicative of the woman herself. It is impossible to speak of so sophisticated a creature as a girl.

Victoria had been a woman since she was twelve; a very shrewd, capable, energetic, little woman who knew exactly what she wanted and how to get it. Time and training had added worldly knowledge and culture, but the character had been formed early. She looked, in her simple little evening dress, sitting before the writing table in the big living-room, like a dainty child, dressed up to play "lady"; only an intent look in the big eyes, and a wrinkle over the nose, as she read and reread the letter lying before her, suggested thought. Suddenly she seized a pen and began to write, with a firm, steady stroke, stopping occasionally, but in the main, writing as one whose thoughts run freely.

MY DEAR GEORGIA PHELPS:

For your very thoughtful letter which lies before me, many thanks. You are right about my

nose. I have, I hope, a sense of humor—otherwise I would be more angry than I am with Alexander Stanley. I appreciate, of course, his kindness in not wishing to marry me for my money, but, frankly, I do not consider myself either so plain or so dull that I have to be married for money.

On the other hand, telling a young man that you want him for himself and not because you are sorry for him, gets to be rather a bore after a while. You can see that, can't you? At the same time, dear Georgia, I am not urging you to throw him too carelessly into the society of Sarah. I have noticed that whenever a dark woman quarrels with her young man, the Lord always sends him a blonde!

I quite agree with you that the young man is fetching; others besides you and the squaw have remarked it. Do you know, I have always thought that missionaries ought all to be young men of twenty-five with taking smiles? The results would be so encouraging among the female heathen. But, seriously, dear girl, I can't write to him and I can't forget him. I was furious with him when he went away and I'm furious still, and yet—if I think of him, I melt like wax.

He's so absurd, you know. He says he can't support me. I don't want him to support me. Lots of men could support me if that was what I wanted, but he's the only one who can make me happy—which is much more important, isn't it? As for that, I can support myself. I have Dad's gift of making money; not an awfully noble one, perhaps, but useful—very. I started half a dozen shops during the war and made every one of them pay.

Of course, you'll say—"Think of all that you had back of you!" That has nothing to do with it. I could start out in an old gown, peddling shoe laces, and I'd make money—it's in the blood—a gift, I suppose, like absolute pitch or writing verse. So, if you happen to be talking to him of me, you might mention that he's not taking any real risks in marrying me. But, perhaps, you'd better not talk about me at all. Just go on looking after him beautifully as you are doing and leave the rest to the Powers that manage those things.

One thing more—it hurts me to hear about those children with no school to go to. I want to build that school at Lobo, and it mustn't be one of those red brick horrors that you see in all little towns when you go through them on the train. It must be white, with a red roof, and a Spanishy sort of patio in the middle, with a fountain for the burros to drink from—burros always look thirsty to me—and a nice old Mission bell on top of it. There, that is settled. Also, I shall send some books to the little Judsonites. Please, dear Georgia, let me have a little fun out of my money when it has cost me so much!

Yours lovingly,

VICTORIA.

Victoria sealed her letter and dropped it in the mail chute outside the door of the apartment; then she returned to the living-room and curled up in an easy chair by the window. Thoughts both pleasant and unpleasant chased each other through her

dark head, apparently, for her expression changed often. Once she rose and paced up and down the room, looking very much like her interesting parent while manipulating a deal. Finally, she rang a bell and a good-looking maid entered.

"Rhoda," said Victoria, quietly, "you and I are going to New Mexico to-night if there's a train."

"New Mexico! But, Miss Victoria, ain't they killin' folks down there?" gasped the horrified Rhoda.

"That is Old Mexico, Rhoda. You mustn't mix up Old and New Mexico. That's provincial and only a New Yorker would do it. Find Parker and tell him to bring me a railway guide, and 'phone for a taxi. And you had better pack up clothes enough for a fortnight in some suitcases—I don't want to be bothered with trunks."

Rhoda, appalled but helpless, vanished. "She's a nice woman," she muttered, as she packed rebelliously, "and I like her, but she's nuts if she is a millionaire! 'Only a New Yorker'—can you beat that? You sure have your troubles when you work for the rich. I'll say you do!"

CHAPTER XIII

A DESPERATE ATTEMPT

To return to Dave Sullivan in Jimenez' camp. This time Pablo took no chances with his captive, but bestowed him safely in the extra room of the cabin, a room which had but one window and that too small and too high to be used as an exit. He then bolted the door on the outside and retired to his rest with a soul at peace.

The prisoner was in a less happy frame of mind. To begin with, he did not feel at ease in regard to his letter. José Baca was not a person who impressed you as having that keen sense of honor which holds a man to his bargain when there is nothing else to bind him. It would be much more like José to put both letter and money in his pocket and keep them there. If the letter did not reach its destination, Dave saw Jimenez with a couple of score of ruffians, calmly crossing the border and annexing the machine guns and anything else that came handy until they were driven out.

"This bird isn't going to stop at the guns," he reasoned. "He's not talking about it but you can

bet he's going to get all he can while he's over there. Why not? With four machine guns and plenty of ammunition, he can raise merry hell for a while."

His own situation was far from agreeable. When it dawned upon Jimenez that the prisoner had overheard his conversation with his midnight visitors, it was going to be decidedly rough sailing for the prisoner.

"If he lets me go, he knows the first thing I'll do when I get back will be to send Sanders and Rogers up for life. It all depends on which he cares the most about, the ransom money, or keeping his pals out of the pen."

He wondered if his absence had been noticed at San Antonio; very likely not. His orders had been indefinite as to time, allowing him discretion as to how long to remain on the scout. If he did not turn up at the end of a week probably they would begin to wonder what had become of him.

Altogether, the night was not a restful one. About six o'clock he dropped asleep and was only wakened by Pablo's wife, who brought him breakfast. Evidently they did not intend to allow him the freedom of the house. Pablo, himself, stood in the doorway while the woman put the food on the floor by the bedside, and went quietly out.

"Gracias, Señora." Dave waked sufficiently to say it as she disappeared.

"You onderstan' Spanish, eh?" growled Pablo, from the doorway.

"Well, after a fashion," replied the prisoner, sitting up, "but if you've got anything very important to say, you'd better stick to English. I'm not feeling very bright this pretty, sunshiny morning."

"You listen! The General send for you later. You don' tell him I leave you in hees cabin las' night, sabe?"

"I'll say I do!" said Dave, admiringly.

"He geeve order for you stay here. He be ver' mad if he fin' you oder place. You tell him an' I cut your t'roat, you onderstan'?" and an ugly scowl accompanied this amiable threat.

Dave controlled a desire to laugh. It was too absurd to see the huge Mexican, under the necessity of saving his own skin, saving Dave's.

"I get you, amigo. I won't say a word." Once alone, he chuckled freely. "Only goes to show how a fellow can work his brains for nothing. Here I put in half the night wonderin' how I could fix it so that razor-backed hog wouldn't give me away to the boss, and here he was after the same thing. No, boy, you'll never cut my throat for telling Jimenez that—not in this world!"

A makeshift bath in a pail of water and a hearty *though* not particularly good breakfast, put Dave

on his feet again, and when word came that the General wished to see the prisoner, the latter was able to feel some of the jauntiness which he assumed. The General and Cordoba sat at the table finishing a late breakfast. After a word or two of greeting, affable on the part of the General, surly on that of the Lieutenant, the former said:

"I will take your full name, please, the name of your station, and also that of your commanding officer. Write it down, Miguel."

The prisoner having obliged with these particulars, he continued: "The matter of your ransom, Señor, will be taken up in a day or two. Can you give me the names of any persons who would be particularly anxious to see you released? Your family ——"

"No family, General, and no one who'd care a cuss what became of me, except the boys at the post."

"They would probably be glad to pay five thousand dollars to save a friend from being shot at daybreak," suggested the General, pleasantly.

"General, if you can get five thousand dollars out of any friends of mine, go right after it. I don't know where they'll get it unless some of them have got in on the oil boom. Last time I saw 'em they were shaking dice and waitin' for last month's pay from the Government. But you can try."

"I shall," said Jimenez. "And unless I get it you will be in a very serious and uncomfortable position. Pablo, put the prisoner in the old cabin down by the corral and fix a guard outside. There are too many coming and going from your place. Adios, Señor!" and he returned to his breakfast. Miguel, however, looked up from his writing as soon as the American had left the room.

"When will you send the message?" he asked, in Spanish.

"Not until we have the machine guns," replied Jimenez. "He cannot get away and I do not care to call attention to our whereabouts until I have finished with the other affair."

"About the other affair—is it your intention to go over merely for the guns?"

"You are thinking of raiding Carrizo, I suppose?"

"It had entered my head, I confess," replied Cordoba, with a grin.

"Mine also, but it seems impractical."

"Why, General?"

"We can cross the border and reach Texas Park in a night's ride but the horses will be used up. We must rest there the next day and return that night. If, on the other hand, we go on to Carrizo, we discover ourselves and will be obliged to make a quick

dash back to the border. The horses will not be able to do it."

"Why rely on horses, General? Sanders has an automobile. A dozen men in an automobile with four machine guns could do much in a short time."

Jimenez was silent but his eyes glittered.

"Think of it, General! There are two stores in Carrizo. You know the business those country stores do! There is a bank, a saloon, and a hotel. They all have money on hand, to say nothing of other things. With an automobile, twelve men and four machine guns, Villa would take the State of Texas."

"It is true, but are we Villa?"

"Why not? All it needs is courage and guns. We have plenty of both."

"It may mean trouble with Sanders," said Jimenez, musingly. "He won't want to involve himself, and I don't want him involved; he is too useful."

"He would lend the machine under force, of course," suggested the other. "We would make that plain."

"I will think about it, my friend. It is not a bad idea, not at all a bad idea. We will consider it."

The shack down by the corral proved to be built, like the others, of pine boards, covered with build-

ing paper to keep out the wind. It had a window, not far from the ground, but too small for anyone but a child to crawl through. The door was bolted on the outside, and a sleepy Mexican loafed all day in the shade of the cabin, only to be relieved by another who did the same all night. A much more hopeless place for a prisoner than Pablo's house, as Jimenez had shrewdly observed, for the chances of escape are always multiplied by the number of people who come and go about the prison.

No one came to the shack except the man who brought food and the boys of the camp who played continually around it, even climbing on the roof and sliding down, after the fashion immemorial of children. Either the empty cabin had been their regular playground, or they were attracted to it by the fact that it held a prisoner. Dave watched them as they played, and reflected that youngsters are alike everywhere, in spite of race, religion, or color.

The cabin could scarcely be said to be furnished; a fireplace of stones, a wood-box, a pile of most unsanitary looking bedding and a basin and pail. Later in the day, the man who brought the food left a couple of rather decent blankets, and some wood —for the chill of evening.

Dave slept well the first night, being warm and comfortable and completely tired out, but the next day the deadly monotony of captivity set in. Noth-

ing to do, nobody to talk to, no hope of escape. It was not queer that his optimism began to go down like a thermometer in a cold room. Occasionally the guard would leave the door open during the day and talk with his prisoner. Now and then the boys would put their dark heads in at the window and chatter in Spanish, but that was all. The days were dreadfully hot and the view which the prisoner had from his window of the dark-hued mountains in the distance was an aggravation scarcely to be borne.

There was one of the youngsters who particularly caught Dave's attention; one "Antonio," or "Tony," as his playmates called him. Tony was the kind of boy to be met with in every community, no matter what its nationality or its size. He was about fourteen and one of those boys who is inevitably connected in some capacity with every disaster that happens in the neighborhood. In fiction we smile at the exploits of a "Tony"; in real life, we yearn frantically to hand him over to the Juvenile Court.

Dave, who had been a "Tony" in his youth, looked with sympathy at the half-naked, wiry, spidery youngster, and on several occasions bribed him with a dime to fetch him cigarettes, thus beginning friendly relations. One day he showed him his army watch, explaining its phosphorescent

quality, and the longing look which accompanied the return of the watch, for Tony was a gentleman though an incipient bandit, rather touched the man.

"Poor little devil!" he thought. "Don't I remember the day that drummer from Milwaukee gave me the first dollar Ingersoll that I ever had? I reckon you'll get this one, Tony, when I leave, unless I go in a hurry some morning before breakfast."

And so the days went by. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, a part of Thursday—all alike, and all hot and dry and hopeless. Often Dave thought of José Baca and wondered if he had played fair, and if so, what the girl at Angus would do? He remembered her so plainly for only having seen her once. Her pretty hair, her blue eyes which would twinkle when she wanted to look severe, her dimples, her firm little chin. Surely a girl with a chin like that would do something! Dave's adventures with girls had been spasmodic affairs, the result usually of propinquity and periods of idleness, and they had made little impression on him, had, in fact, given him an idea that he did not care much for women.

Women, he felt vaguely, ought to be a lot finer than men, and the kind he had known hadn't been. It wasn't a question of class, either. His mother had been poor, hard working, and scantily educated,

but she had been a lady, Dave sturdily told himself, and being a lady went deeper than clothes or education. The little postmistress was a lady, and being one, she wouldn't flinch from a little trouble to help a fellow out. But what could she do? That was the question.

Just at this moment he heard a thud over his head. The boys were sliding down the sloping roof as usual; this time, however, something had happened. In one corner of the roof, furthest from the window, a small brown foot had come through and dangled inside the room. Dave was up in a moment. The foot was as instantly withdrawn, and there was a sound of giggling from the roof. Tony's mischievous face appeared for a moment in the opening and disappeared as quickly. In another moment the youngsters had slid off the roof and were running down to the river bed.

Dave brought the wood-box out and standing on it investigated the phenomenon. Like many phenomena the explanation was simple. One of the boards had a knot-hole in it as big as a man's two hands; it had been practically invisible because of its covering of black paper, but when the board had given way under the repeated attacks of small boy, and had let Tony's foot through paper and all, it was distinctly visible. Carefully, that he might not attract the attention of the drowsy guard

outside, Dave tried to enlarge the break with his hands, but met with little success. Suddenly he turned; someone was at the window. Tony's face, lighted by two big eyes, was surveying him with interested attention. Dave jumped off the box and strode nonchalantly to the window.

"Well, young man," he said, "what's the idea, breaking in the roof?"

Tony giggled appreciatively but slyly.

"Perhaps I break it for you to get out of, Señor," he suggested, politely.

"Out of that? You'll have to fall through a few more times, I'm afraid, before you'll do me much good."

"If I should bring my little axe, the one I chop my wood with?" Tony's voice was low and mysterious.

"Say, young fellow, do you mean that?" Dave's voice dropped also.

"Perhaps—if he got away—the Señor might leave me the watch that shines in the dark?"

"You bet I will, son, not a doubt about that, but —yes, I reckon an axe might do the business—but how about that chap that goes on watch at night? He'd hear, wouldn't he?"

Tony giggled delightedly. "That Manuel, he makes love to my sister, Bonita. Every night about nine o'clock they go down by the river. One hears

them laughing and talking. Between nine and ten o'clock the Señor must do it and I will have his horse saddled for him back of the corral."

Dave solemnly unfastened the watch from his wrist and handed it to the boy. Then, with a sudden thought: "Look here, son, what'll they do to you if they catch you?"

Tony looked his contempt at the suggestion. "Why should they catch me? Am I a fool, to be showing the watch to everyone? Some day I go to join Villa, then I will wear it. This Jimenez is no true Mexican, Señor; he does all for money, while Villa is for Mexico. I have heard my father say so."

"Well, I'm not posted on Villa; I've always thought he was rather a bad lot, but don't you forget the axe, and we'll see what we can do to-night while Manuel's sparking your sister."

The afternoon wore on slowly. Dave was saving his last box of cigarettes for the trip; he would need them then. He also rolled up the two blankets. They were good blankets, and he would need them, too, on the trip. Jimenez had forfeited that much by his detention of a citizen of a friendly country. He imagined that from his window, which commanded a view of the corral, he saw preparations on hand for an expedition. A number of horses were being driven in from pasture,

and he saw several men cleaning guns and tinkering with saddles.

"Getting ready for a little jaunt across the border, I'll bet," he concluded. "I hope José Baca played fair and that they'll run into a hornet's nest."

Evening came and the Mexican brought his supper. He put aside some bread and a little bacon; that, too, he would need on the trip.

"I'm putting a good deal of faith in that kid," he reflected, "giving him the watch in advance, but, somehow, I can always tell an honest youngster. I reckon, too, he's getting more real pleasure out of this than I am; probably wouldn't slip up on it for a house and lot."

Seven o'clock came, and eight; but Dave, who had no watch, could only guess at the time, and his impatience made it seem hours later than it was. Another spell of interminable waiting, and he heard Manuel replacing the day guard. He trusted the fair Bonita would not take this night to be coy. Finally, it grew dark and then darker; the moon had not yet risen; Dave felt an agony of nervousness. He thought of a dozen things that might have detained the boy or made the plan impossible. At last, he heard the sound he was waiting for.

"Be quick, Señor!" Tony spoke excitedly. "Manuel has been gone five minutes by my watch;

someone may come and miss him. Here!" Dave felt the sharp little hatchet thrust into his hand. "I go to get the horse." And Tony was off.

Dave seized the wood-box, climbed upon it, and began to pry the hole larger. The noise he made was frightful in his ears. It seemed to him that he must be heard all over the camp. He stopped to listen. The usual night sounds came to his ear; a mandolin in a cabin near by, and a man's voice singing; from a further point he heard laughter and loud voices; evidently there was a card game on; in the distance a wolf howled as only that forlorn animal can howl. Then, blessed sound, came the noise of someone chopping wood near by; perhaps it would be confused with his own efforts. He started again, and this time did not stop until he had wrenched a hole big enough to allow the passage of his body. If they came and caught him, all right, but he would have a try at escape, he told himself.

He was dripping with perspiration; the unnatural attitude, the haste, the anxiety, all combined to shake his nerve. He did not remember having been so badly scared since the first time he had gone up in a plane by himself. He dropped the blankets out of the window and the axe on top of them, and in a few minutes had pulled himself up onto the roof. Everything seemed as usual. He dropped

to the ground, picked up the things, and made for the corral. His heart almost failed him as he saw a couple, a man and a woman, approaching. If it were Manuel and Bonita! He grasped the axe with a sinister hold, but it was not Manuel, and the lovers were too much interested in each other to regard him. Perhaps they too had their own reasons for avoiding observation, for they melted quietly into the gloom.

"Well, I'm glad of that. I'd hate to bust a fellow when he's with his girl. Wouldn't like it myself." By which you may know that Dave's spirits were rising.

At the back of the corral a small figure waited, holding a horse, the pinto.

"Thank you, son; I wish I could do something for you besides giving you the watch. I'll take you along, if you say so? How'd you like to live in a country where you can go to the circus, eh? And play baseball?"

"I like the bull-fight better, Señor. On Sunday sometimes we go to Capitan where there is a bull-fight. One Sunday I saw four bulls killed, and when the last one died, the people all stood and cheered him, he was so brave!" Tony's eyes glittered.

"Well, of course, I can't compete with the bull-fight, son, though I might run you down to Chicago

and show you the stockyards! Well, adios, take my advice and don't flash that watch around much for a while; no use getting licked if you don't have to."

Alone again, Dave mounted the pinto and started up the trail which led out of the canyon and into the mountains. He had made his plans already. He intended to continue on the west-going trail, even though it led him higher into the mountains than he wanted to go, until he struck a trail going north. Then he would strike out for the border. He didn't care where he hit the border as long as he didn't hit it where and when Jimenez did. Of course, he would have much preferred to go back by the way he had come, the rude map of which he had drawn for Georgia; but that was impossible. It meant either going down the canyon through the camp, or trying to cross back in the mountains, which meant a loss of time.

The trail, once it emerged from the canyon, was narrow, but not rough. Dave fancied that it must have been used a good deal by the mining people who had been driven out of the canyon. On one side, the hills rose abruptly, on the other, the little stream which flowed through the camp ran through a rocky little bed, in a narrow gulch. The moon was coming up and he could see his way fairly well, but he longed to leave the trail, for with the morn-

ing light he fancied it would be easy for the bandits to follow him.

Finally he struck the longed-for trail, another canyon, leading north. It was rougher and evidently less traveled, but the moon gave good light and he found that he could manage without great difficulty. The stars were out, those bright, wonderful stars of the desert country, so near, so friendly, and so sociable! A wonderful night for lovers, Dave reflected, with unwonted sentimentality. Not being a happy pair, however, he urged the pinto to greater speed, and so rode on, sometimes rapidly, sometimes slowly, because of the roughness of the ground, sometimes dismounting and leading the horse over an unusually bad-looking place.

Finally, after seven hours of almost continuous riding, the daylight began to appear, and Dave looked around him for a hiding place. He figured that his absence would hardly be discovered before the hour at which the man was wont to bring his breakfast. He was seven hours' riding to the good, anyhow, besides the extra three or four that would elapse before they would miss him and start. Of course, if they did trail him, they could cover the ground more quickly in daylight than he had been able to do at night. His plan was to find a hiding place for himself and the pinto, somewhere off the

trail, where he could put in the day, and then push forward again at night. If the worst happened, and he lost his way absolutely, he would strike for the nearest town and demand protection from the Federal Government. It was not, all things considered, a very desirable thing to do, but Dave had had enough of bandits and he did not mean to encounter any more of them if he could help it.

Both horse and rider were dead tired and it was nearly ten o'clock before Dave found a means of leaving the trail in what he considered a safe way. An almost dry river bed whose rocky bottom, filled with pools of water left from a recent storm, gave him the opportunity of leaving the trail without betraying the fact too patently to those who might follow. Riding up this arroyo about half a mile, he struck an almost invisible trail, evidently used by range cattle coming down from the hills to drink at times when the river was full of water. Following it, he climbed the side of a small mountain, lost himself to view amid its scrub pines and little gullies, and finally rounded the other side, coming out into a small-sized pine forest. He dismounted and led the pinto into the midst of it, tying him loosely so that he might feed. Then, rolling himself in his blankets, both he and the horse entirely invisible from the trail which he had left, he ate

sparingly of the food which he had brought with him.

From ten o'clock until five, Dave and the pinto ate, dozed, and rested generally, in their small haven. Twice Dave roused himself and walked around the crest of the hill to where he could look down upon the country over which he had come, but he saw no signs of men or horses. Whether he had succeeded in throwing them off the trail, or whether they had passed him unknowingly, he could not tell. The truth of the matter, and one which would have greatly relieved his mind had he known it, was that the departure of Jimenez and his men that morning had prevented his own escape from being found out until later than he had hoped for, and the pursuit, undertaken after Jimenez had gone, for they had not dared tell him of the prisoner's escape, had lacked capable leadership and had taken an entirely wrong direction.

At five o'clock Dave and the pinto descended again into the river bed and, taking the first trail that was at hand, rode north perseveringly, until halted by the rain; the same terrific storm which had so ill-treated Georgia and Captain Crowder. Unlike them, however, poor Dave had no slicker and was drenched to the skin in the first fifteen minutes of the rainfall. Also, Ortega's horse developed a dislike for thunder and lightning, as

horses sometimes do, which enabled him to give a great deal of trouble. Dave tried various shelters, a tree, a clump of bushes, a cliff ledge, all with very little profit, and finally realized that he was losing his sense of direction. It was growing dark and he saw that before long he would be completely lost. Nor did the idea of camping out under a tree in the storm appeal to him; shelter of some sort or other he must have.

"By George, I believe I'll give this brute his head and let him take me back to Ortega's if he can. It's not the place I started for, but the way I feel now, any place with a fire will do me," and he dropped the reins on the horse's neck and went on stolidly in the dark.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE GOATHERD'S TENT

WHEN the tent flap closed behind Captain Crowder, and when, a few minutes later, Georgia heard his horse's hoofs clattering down the trail, the most complete feeling of loneliness she had ever known attacked her. She jumped off the bed, regardless of the wet ground, and ran outside to see the last of him, as she pessimistically put it. The moon was rising and she could see the Captain's figure as he rode stolidly away, like an Indian going on the war-path.

The rain was over, and the stars were out, her own stars that she so loved to watch at Angus. They seemed so much less friendly down here. The little corral, with its sleeping goats, watched over by Max, gave her no sense of companionship; she didn't like goats; cattle would have seemed much more human. In the distance, coyotes yipped enthusiastically. It isn't at all disagreeable to hear coyotes yip when you have company and a roof over your head; but when you are alone and in a tent,

at that, it is different. The sound suggests lonesome graves in the desert with little picket fences around them and—but she would not allow herself to think of such things!

Georgia returned to the tent, made fast the flap, and threw herself on the bed of pine boughs again. Fortunately, her own blankets were dry, as they had been under her saddle, protected by her slicker. She drew them around her, and by keeping up the fire in the stove, managed to be physically comfortable at least. The lantern, she decided, she would keep lighted. This might be foolish, as it could very easily attract undesirable attention, but she couldn't help it. To sit all night in the darkness, alone, knowing perfectly well that there might be anything from mountain lions to Mexican bandits in the neighborhood, was more than she could possibly bear.

Georgia was a Western girl and not given to what Mr. Jeff would have called "ideas"; she had often stayed alone at Angus under conditions that would have terrified the average city girl; but Angus was different, it was home! Nor was she without reason. Anyone who has followed the history of Mexico for the last few years has mental pictures which quite rival those of the outrages in Belgium and Northern France. Georgia knew a number of unsavory stories which at Angus had

sounded overdrawn and unreal, but which, sitting on little Pedro's bed and listening to the coyotes, acquired suddenly the accents of truth.

When she had banished the stories, ideas of her own took possession of her. Suppose, for instance, that José Baca should come? There was no particular reason why he shouldn't, he probably used the tent whenever he chose, and if he had heard of Carlos' death he might quite likely be in the neighborhood. The thought of spending the night in a tent with José Baca destroyed what courage Georgia had left. She determined that she would not stay another moment.

By this time, she was a little hysterical. Remembering the Captain's parting injunction not to leave the tent till the boys came, and knowing perfectly well that she ought to obey it, she began at once to find reasons to justify her in yielding to her panic. Suppose anything happened to the Captain? Suppose he were to fall into the hands of bandits, what would become of the letter and its message? Who would rescue Dave Sullivan and guard against the raid which Jimenez might already be planning?

It was her duty to go on somehow, anyhow. If the mare couldn't walk, she could. She could do anything, absolutely anything, rather than sit in that horrible tent, waiting for José Baca to appear.

Hastily she put on her riding boots, which were now partly dry, and folded up the blankets. She would try the mare; Georgia had ridden too long to look upon walking with much enthusiasm; then remembering that her hair was still hanging, she began to arrange it, when she heard Max bark!

Georgia dropped the yellow mass instantly and if it be true that hearts ever stop beating before the time when they stop finally, it is certain that hers did at that moment. There was a sound of a horse's hoofs on the trail, and with a resignation born of utter terror, Georgia realized that it was too late to make her escape.

Max barked furiously for a moment or two and then stopped. Georgia stole to the flap of the tent and peeped out cautiously. The man had dismounted and was patting the dog. Then he came toward the tent. The girl backed suddenly. There was still time to put out the light, but what use? He would light it and discover her. She put down the lantern and turned desperately to face the man. Her knees were shaking like young trees in a storm, but she would put a good face on the matter if she could. The tent flap was pushed aside and the man's head appeared. Georgia gave one convulsive gasp and darting forward, seized his coat hysterically.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh, you! Where did you

come from? Why did you scare me to death like that? Why ——" And the rest of it was wept or, as she afterward said, howled, into Dave Sullivan's leather coat.

Dave, himself, was almost as startled as the girl had been. To poke your head into a tent which you have every reason to believe inhabited by a Mexican goatherd, and to find yourself seized and wept over by a woman, a young woman and a white one, if a hasty glance can be trusted, is disconcerting to say the least.

"Well, I'm sure sorry, ma'am, if I scared you," he said, "but not expecting to see a lady ——"

"Oh!" Georgia let go suddenly and drew away from him. "Oh, you don't even know who I am—or why I was so scared! Why, I thought you were José Baca!"

"José Baca! Well, if you thought I was José, I don't blame you for —— By golly, it's the little postmistress!" and Dave stared open-mouthed.

Georgia, who had collapsed weakly on the pine bed, nodded amid gusts of half hysterical laughter.

"Of course it is! Oh, do please say something! Don't stand there looking at me as if I was a ghost. I apologize for grabbing you and crying all over you, but how could I help it? You'll never know how scared I was when you put your head in that door—never!"

But Dave was staring at her now with a sort of horror in his face.

"Never mind that," he said, almost angrily; "what are you doing down here by yourself? If I thought that that infernal letter of mine had ——"

"No, no, it wasn't your letter. I didn't get that till this morning. But you're soaking wet! Come up here by the stove and dry yourself. Take off your coat and your boots ——"

"I don't do anything till I know what you're doing down here," replied Dave, obstinately; but he did move nearer the stove, and he let the girl help him draw off the wet coat. "I don't see ——"

"Oh, well, you can't see everything all in a minute, you know," replied Georgia. "My boots were just as wet as yours and I dried them by the stove. Of course, if you prefer wet boots ——"

Dave took them off and draped them around the stove. Georgia took the pail in which she had made the Captain's coffee, added some water and put it on top of the stove. Then she sat down beside the airman, her feet tucked Oriental-wise beneath her, and began to talk. "I believe," she said, "I'll tell you the whole story."

"I would," suggested Dave. "If you can show me any reason why a nice American girl should be putting in the night in a goatherd's tent in Sonora, I'd like to hear it."

"You've no right to ask me that way!" replied Georgia, with spirit. "You aren't my father, or my big brother, or my young man ——"

"If I was, you wouldn't be down here," replied Dave, indignantly. "Suppose I had been José Baca ——" He paused; the girl changed color.

"Don't, please, I can't bear to think of it! When I saw you outside ——" She broke down and buried her face in her hands. Dave patted the brown hand comfortably.

"Don't try to, sister," he said, "it wasn't and it isn't going to be. Tell me what you meant about not getting my letter till this morning."

"Oh, yes, it was this way!" And Georgia, pulling herself together, took up the story. There was something very comfortable, very dependable about this big, cross-looking fellow. She didn't know why she felt so at home with him. Why, this was only the second time they had met, and she was talking to him just as she talked to Mr. Jeff or the Captain! He was the kind of man that she was used to, that was it. The kind that scolded or petted, browbeat or praised, but never forgot himself, and never took advantage, or behaved like anything but the good, plain, crotchety, faultfinding, generous, manageable man that the American woman knows and loves. She began at the beginning and told him the whole story, from the ride with Rogers

down to the Captain's departure. Dave listened patiently.

"Well," he said, when she had finished, "you're a brave girl and no mistake; but if you belonged to me, I'd hobble you. I never heard of anything quite so darned foolish — I beg your pardon, ma'am—so awful reckless in all my life. What this Captain Crowder was thinking of to let you come piling over here after a couple of greaser kids that weren't any kin to you, I don't know."

"He couldn't help himself," said Georgia, indignantly. "I made him come. It didn't look nearly so reckless when we were thinking about it."

"No, most foolishness doesn't, I've noticed."

"Well, if I hadn't come we wouldn't have found your letter and the Captain couldn't have gone back with it as he has."

"And ridin' all over the country with loafers like that Rogers chap," persisted Dave. "What are your folks thinking about, anyhow?"

"Oh, they're in New York!" responded Georgia, airily. "And I didn't know then that Jim Rogers goes down into Mexico and has dealings with bandits."

"Bless you, yes! You ought to have heard 'em talk. This chap, Jimenez, is a clever devil. He's got a wife who lives in New York, and who banks his money for him, and sends him guns and ammu-

nition. Sanders and Rogers have been mixed up pretty thick with him, judging from their talk, and they sounded to me as if they were getting about ready to quit the job."

"I guess," suggested Georgia, "that they know people are talking about them. Oh, to think of Jim Rogers being such a two-faced worm!"

"So then I bribed José Baca to get that letter to you, either him or Carlos. I lied to him a bit, told him you were my girl, or I couldn't have got him to touch it. I never could have gotten either of them near San Antonio, but he didn't seem to be quite so scared of Angus."

"I see," demurely. "And the raid?"

"Well, that I can't say, only if I know old Jimenez, there'll be one all right. He's not the chap to be content with four guns when he can have four guns and a lot besides. So I thought I'd warn you. I'm sorry about Carlos, but we've all got to go some time."

"It's hard on Anita and the children," said the girl, soberly. "That's why I wanted to take them home with me. It would have been so easy if the mare hadn't failed us."

"It wouldn't have been so easy if they'd caught you smugglin' them over," said Dave, in a shocked tone. "Why, it's not even respectable!"

"Where are those deserters hidden?" demanded

Georgia, who, in truth, was not used to quite such frank disapproval on the part of the other sex.

"I don't know. They pointed it out to Jimenez on his map—he's got a big map, sort of forest reserve business, shows all the trails and such—and I couldn't hear what they said. Sanders seemed to be pretty sure they couldn't be found. It's some old rustler's place they've stumbled on."

"I'll bet I know what it is!" cried the girl, excitedly. "We have an old cave over near us, a huge thing that runs in the direction of Mesa and Texas Park. Nobody knows where the other end of it is; it's blocked inside somehow so that you can't go through. The Indians and the old cattle rustlers both used it. I'll bet Sanders has found the other entrance and hidden them there. Of course they'd be safe; we've hunted for that place for years!"

"That's it, I reckon," said Dave, and then went on with the story of his escape from Jimenez. "I wandered around in that storm to-night till I was completely off my road, so I decided to let this horse—he belongs to Ortega—find his way home and take me along. Just then I saw the tent and your light, and, thinks I, there's some poor wretch of a goatherd living alone; I'll put up with him for the night, and maybe, if I'm lucky, he'll direct me

right in the morning. Funny streak of luck, wasn't it?"

"It was mighty good luck for me," replied Georgia, simply, and again the big man patted the small brown hand in his friendly manner. It looked so small and helpless that he did it quite as unconsciously as he would have patted Juan or Luis Baca, or even the brown puppy. He noted what childlike blue eyes the girl had. Why, they were as trustful and as friendly as those of Juan or Luis. He thought of Jim Rogers and felt again a wild desire to punch his head.

"The nerve of him to ask a decent girl like her to ride around with him!" he thought indignantly. "I'll bet he thinks he's in love with her. As though a girl like her would look at a common chap like him—or like me, either!" he finished, gloomily. "Ten to one she's in love with that army boy from New York that's staying with her. Well, from all accounts, he's more her kind."

By this time the coffee was hot and Georgia offered it with some bread and cheese that the Captain had left her.

"The Captain is great for cheese," she said, laughingly. "He's such a funny old dear!" Then as she saw Dave wrapping up the bread and cheese and putting it in his coat pocket: "Why, aren't you hungry?"

"Well, not much. I had something a while ago and the coffee will do me all right. Most likely we'll need this in the morning."

"Oh."

"I don't know what you're planning to do, but I'd like to get out of here before daybreak. If I'm not mistaken, old Jimenez was figuring to start sometime to-day; they were bringing horses up from pasture all day yesterday, and this was about the time he and Sanders fixed to go over. If your friend, the Captain, should miss connections anyway it's up to you and me to get word over as soon as we can. Do you reckon that horse of yours will be fit to travel by morning?"

Georgia shook her head. "The Captain said not. He wanted me to borrow the Bacas' burro."

"Well, I'm aiming to get away from here before the Bacas show up. I don't want any trouble with José Baca when I'm not heeled."

Georgia smiled and handed over her revolver.

"Bless your heart, it looks real, don't it? Will it shoot?"

"Of course it will. I've shot rabbits with it—at least, one rabbit."

"Well, it was a darned mean advantage to take of a self-respecting rabbit, to hammer him with a machine gun like that. Did you hurt him?"

"I injured him considerably," replied Georgia, haughtily. "We ate him afterward."

"Well, as I was saying, I don't care much to meet José just now, and I want you and me to clear out of here about an hour before daylight, and hit it up on that trail that you and the Captain left yesterday. I'm not easy in my mind about the Captain, and I'd like to deliver that message to the Colonel, myself," said Dave, earnestly.

"But how ——"

"I'm figuring that my horse will carry double. If he won't, you'll ride and I'll walk, or we'll ride and tie. Anyhow, we ought to get out of here as soon as we can. What do you say?"

"I say let's go," replied Georgia, promptly. "Once the sun is up this mud will dry quickly, and we can't be so awfully far from the border; a few hours, the Captain said."

"That's how I figured it," said Dave. "Now, if you'll roll yourself up in those blankets of yours and try to get some sleep, I'll go and look after the horses. I haven't been doing much of anything except sleep for the last few days, so I'll just sit up and keep the fire going." And drawing on his boots again he left the tent.

Georgia finished the interrupted operation of dressing her hair, and curled herself up in the blankets, not to sleep—she was still too nervous for

that—but to relax into a state of comfort which half an hour ago would have seemed impossible. There are people who, whether you like them or not, inspire confidence; confidence in their strength and their sincerity. Dave Sullivan was one of these. A fortnight ago Georgia would have unhesitatingly declared that she did not like him. Why should a spoiled only child like a person who contradicted her and who was plainly indifferent as to whether she liked him or not?

Now, however, she could not have said honestly that she did not like Dave Sullivan. In fact, if she told the truth she would be obliged to say that she was beginning to like him very much. She liked his plain, commonplace way of talking; the way a man talks who knows his own mind and who speaks from it without hesitation, albeit a little crudely. She liked the matter-of-fact way in which he had told her to roll up and get some sleep; as though no sensible girl could object to so doing. She even liked his looks better than she had before. He would never win hearts by sheer winsomeness of feature or smile as Alec Stanley did, but he had something in his face that she was beginning to think quite as attractive as the "Prince of Wales" smile.

"You're going to be sorry along about to-morrow noon if you don't get some rest," remarked the sub-

ject of her reflections, coming in and finding the girl sitting up, bundled in her blankets. "But I suppose you're too nervous to let go, eh?"

"Yes, I am," admitted Georgia. "I'm not scared —just nervous. There's a difference."

"I should say there was," answered Dave, seating himself beside her, and stretching his feet toward the stove. "When I was in the automobile business, I never won a race that I wasn't all keyed up over, but I wasn't scared."

"Tell me about the races and the aeroplane and all the rest of it. I want to stop thinking about Jimenez and his men."

Dave laughed and put some more wood in the stove. Talking to girls wasn't much in his line, he would have told you, but when a lady demands to be made to forget, what can a mere man do? So he began to talk idly of the days in France; not of hairbreadth air flights or burning planes, but of the life in the big squadron, and the men he had known, and of the thousand and one humorous touches that come even into a life that walks hand in hand with death.

Then, by easy stages, he went back to the days in New York, when he drove the big racing cars, and back of that to his cowboy days in Arizona, and still further back to when as a youngster he had run away to sea, shipping as a cabin boy.

"Anybody can have the sea who wants it," he said, with a grin. "I wasn't built for it, I guess. Give me a good machine under me or a plane. I like it up-stairs pretty well."

"I don't see why!" said the girl, with a little shiver, a picture of the mutilated "Maria" rising before her.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking about, but it's not always like that. It's more apt to be too tame; nothing happening, and nothing to do but sail along. It's funny, though, when I stop to think of when I was a youngster and how my eyes would have popped out if I could have seen myself up in the air!"

Then he told her of the farm in Wisconsin, and the grandmother, and the family of children, and of how hungry they had often been.

"The neighbors used to ask us in to a meal sometimes, but we'd always say we'd had our dinner. Poor little shavers—empty to our toes most of the time! Well, kids are queer things. It made me think of the old days when I spent that night with those little greasers back at Baca's place. I like your coming over here to get those kids, but you ought to be walloped for it just the same."

"Never mind about me," said Georgia, trying to hide the tears that had come into her eyes at the picture of the hungry youngsters; "tell me some

more about that dandy grandmother of yours. How old were you when she died?"

And so the night passed. Toward morning, Georgia got a little sleep and once relaxed, she would have slept for hours, but Dave was too anxious for an early start to indulge her. It was after three o'clock by the girl's watch when he tramped off to get the horses, and she put her few things together in her saddle-bag preparatory to starting off.

After an examination, Dave concluded that the mare could travel. She was lame, but it seemed to be principally stiffness, and would probably wear off the quicker for being used. At any rate, they would try her; they could not hope to make much speed anyhow over so rough a trail. It was still dark as they left the tent, darker than it had been, for the moon was waning and the daylight had not appeared.

"If I could only be sure that the Captain had made it safely, I believe I could enjoy this," said Georgia, whose courage had returned with the nearing of day.

"If he hasn't, I wouldn't wonder if there'd be doin's over in the neighborhood of Carrizo before a great while," replied Dave, a little grimly.

Georgia's spirits would have sunk lower than her half-dried boots could she have been vouchsafed a vision of the Captain at that particular moment.

IN THE GOATHERD'S TENT

So far from having "made it," that unfortunate elderly gentleman had fallen in with a scouting party of the Carranza Government, had been conveyed to the border town of Capitan, where he was turned over to the officer there representing the Mexican Government and recorded as a suspicious character, apparently an American, found wandering about the country without a passport on business which seemed to have something to do with one Jimenez, bandit.

CHAPTER XV

MOCKING BIRD GAP

HAD any of the fiscal guards of the Federal Government been occupied in policing that particular spot on the Mexican Border known, not on any map, but to the inhabitants of the neighborhood in two languages, as Mocking Bird Gap; or had the immigration officials on the American side been equally active, on the night which saw Dave and Georgia leave the Baca tent, Captain Crowder fall into the hands of the rurales, and Victoria Dunlap speed across the desert on the limited train; they would have seen something which would have interested them tremendously.

Some two miles or so on the Mexican side of the line, in a retired spot, was located a cabin. This cabin had belonged at one time to an American, who believed that there was oil in the vicinity. He discovered at about the same time that there was no oil, but that there was a band of thieves in the neighborhood, known locally as "bandits," that made it quite inexpedient for a foreigner to remain there, encumbered, as he was, with a wife and family, and a flock of sheep. Whereupon, he had

taken what he could, left what he couldn't, and fled the country.

The bandits who had annoyed him were not bandits in the larger sense of the word. They were merely hard-up citizens who had been driven by circumstances into a predatory manner of living. Later, when Jimenez, finding competition rather keen in his part of the country, had migrated to Sonora, these scattered bands had thrown in their lot with him, and the cabin had long been one of their resting spots. It had been raided several times by both the Federal and the Rebel forces, but it remained intact. As a matter of fact, it formed a comfortable rendezvous for travelers who did not happen to fear its evil reputation, and on this particular night when the sudden and violent storm had swept the countryside, Jimenez and his twenty men were glad to take refuge there.

They had left the camp late in the morning and had ridden by devious trails for a number of hours and they wanted to rest their horses before making the final dash across the border. One scout had gone ahead to give warning of any inconvenient movement on the part of the Federal forces, and the rest sat around the fireplaces in the cabin, drying their clothes, for the equipment of most of them did not run to slickers.

Jimenez, himself, was seated in the better of the

two rooms which the cabin afforded, accompanied by Cordoba. Jimenez was in a disagreeable frame of mind and therefore neither he nor his lieutenant was doing much talking. The General was not a man of adventurous spirit when the question was one of physical effort. He would have shone in a financial career where one bucked against the cunning money sense of other men. These were risks which stirred his blood; but risks that took one out on a wet night, to run a gauntlet of border officials who yearned for a legitimate excuse to shed one's blood, were risks of a different color altogether.

Not that the General was a coward; far from it. When it was necessary to fight, he fought with anything that came handy, and with the persistence of a thoroughly enraged stout man; but he regretted the necessity. Fighting seemed such a brainless way of getting the better of the other fellow. Also it involved one in such a lot of physical discomfort, and physically, Jimenez was lazy. Consequently, when on an expedition, he was inclined to be morose and disagreeable.

He would rather have left this particular expedition in the hands of Cordoba had he felt sure of that young man's execution, which he did not. Also, he did not fully trust Cordoba. He had shown signs of late of being a man of ideas; for instance, this

one in regard to the automobile of Sanders. A man who continually has ideas is very soon going to want to set up in business for himself. Given this raid lucratively worked out there could be no better time for a lieutenant with ambitions to crawl into the shoes of his superior officer. One kept an eye on fellows with ideas. But the expedition made him disagreeable, as I have said, and very poor company. He would have been angrier still had he guessed that his $5,000 captive had broken loose, but Pablo, knowing his commander's touchy temper, had concealed this bit of information, hoping to be able to trail the prisoner successfully during the General's absence.

One of the men brought in some more wood for the fire and a pail of coffee. Anything stronger than coffee was prohibited by Jimenez during an expedition, though allowed freely enough at any other time. Warmed by the drink, the General spoke.

"Can you," he asked, tersely, "drive an automobile?"

"I?" Cordoba stared. "Certainly not. Sanders can drive the automobile."

"He can, but I would prefer not to have him. Sanders is useful to me; I would like to keep him out of this business."

"Rogers, then?"

"I don't trust him; at least not on those roads. There is the Divide, the other side of Angus. I question whether an automobile has ever been driven over that road. I shall have to do it, myself, I suppose."

"You, General!" Cordoba looked his surprise. "I did not know that you understood the nature of automobiles."

"No, I suppose not," ungraciously. "What you do not know about me, Cordoba, would, as our American friends say, fill a large book! However, you understand our program? From Texas Park, after getting the guns, we go by Angus, cutting the telephone and telegraph wires as we go; arrived at Carrizo, it is thus—the bank, the store, the station, the principal saloon—at each of these points we place a machine gun, with one of our men behind it. While they keep the streets clear, we go through each building and take what we find. After that, the dash back to our horses. With the advantage we have in time, we should have no trouble in getting away."

"None whatever," agreed Cordoba. "With your permission, General, I will snatch a little sleep. The storm has made me drowsy."

The General nodded, and as Cordoba, wrapped in his cloak, stretched out on the floor by the fire, he took out a pack of cards and drawing up a stool

began, by the light of a candle stuck in an empty whiskey bottle, to play a game of Canfield.

Meanwhile, Dave and Georgia had plodded some distance along the trail upon which the Captain had started out. Their progress had been slow, necessarily, on account of the mare's stiffness and the rough trail. About an hour's riding brought them out at a place which struck Dave as being very familiar, and he very shortly identified it with his first day's traveling in Old Mexico.

"This is the place where Baca and Ortega tried to finish me," he said, as they watered the horses. "Gosh, it's good to come onto a landmark! Jimenez' men came out of those bushes over to the left. There's a trail there that leads in a roundabout sort of way to their camp. We don't want that."

"No," said the girl, with a little shiver. "Why can't we cross here and follow this one?"

"That's what I was aiming to do when they got me," chuckled Dave. "We will. How are you coming? Tired?"

"No, just anxious to get on. Can't we go a little faster?"

"We'll try, as soon as it gets lighter. What time does that foxy wrist ornament of yours give?"

"Four o'clock."

"It'll be light soon. We'll have to move livelier then."

"It's easier going down here in the foot-hills. Why, this isn't a trail at all, it's a road."

"I wish it wasn't," said Dave, ruefully. "Roads have folks on them. We're not looking for company in this man's country."

The two horses fell into a side by side trot instead of the single file in which they had been traveling. There was as yet no hint of daylight; a solemn hour, no matter whether it be spent in the solitude of one's chamber or in the vast out-of-doors. The night sounds of coyotes, owls, tree toads, together with mysterious scurryings in the brush, all lent sombreness and a touch of awe to what was otherwise deep stillness. The horses kept up the little Spanish jog which covers ground so rapidly; the riders, knee to knee, spoke seldom, but scanned the road with its shadows. Once a rattlesnake hissed close to the mare's foot and gave that unsettled animal an occasion for a sudden rear. Dave muttered something under his breath, but smiled as he saw how well the girl handled her.

"Don't scold her—she's a nervous woman—I know just how she feels," said Georgia. "Listen! Did you hear that? It sounded like a horse's neigh."

"No, I didn't hear anything," replied Dave, "I

guess it's your imagination." And they rode on again in silence.

Suddenly Georgia exclaimed: "I know where we are! There's the old Joe Jefferson Rock—right ahead of us. We're just about a mile from the border. See!"

Dave looked ahead, along the line of the girl's outstretched arm. A rough looking ravine ran along at their left, while the ragged outlines of a hill, resembling the sides of a quarry, was at their right. A few rods ahead of them the road swerved abruptly to the right and a jagged mass of rock jutted out from the cliff. Its dark outlines resembled, if one saw them from the right spot, the features of the great comedian to a really startling degree.

"This is an old wood road," the girl exclaimed, joyfully. "It runs like this for a while, then goes through some rather rough canyons, but it's always a road. We used to drive it when we came down in wagons to camp in the hunting season. The Mexicans use it to cart their wood. It goes through a place they call Mocking Bird Gap, and it's about four or five miles east of Baca's place, perhaps not quite that far. Over to the right about a quarter of a mile there used to be a sheep ranch that was owned by an American, but I suppose he's been driven out long ago."

She stopped suddenly and putting out her hand seized the pommel of Dave's saddle. Her voice dropped to a frightened whisper.

"Look!" she gasped. "Over there—who are they——"

"Hush!" Dave reined both horses over to the shadow of the cliff. In front of them, from a cross trail, emerged a line of men on horseback, so suddenly and so quietly, that they had the appearance of moving pictures. The man and the girl held their breath—if they had not already been seen there was a good chance that the dark shadow thrown by the cliff in the moonlit road might prove a protection, but just as the last rider crossed the road, one of the horses neighed, and the mare answered. Dave cursed angrily. Some of the riders rode rapidly toward them.

"Turn 'em back!" Dave spurred the pinto and administered a kick to the mare and the two broke into a trot, but it was too late. The men were upon them, their retreat was cut off, and they were whirled about and swept into the centre of the main party. Dave whispered to the girl as he saw the leader of the party: "It's Jimenez, by golly!"

Georgia's face blanched. "Oh, Dave! What shall we do?"

"Sit tight. We'll manage somehow." She had called him "Dave"! That was something to re-

member, only, he reflected soberly, she was so scared she didn't know what she was saying.

"Well," remarked Jimenez, whose appearance on horseback was rather Napoleonic, and whose manner was irascible. "Who are they? What?" Then in answer to the muttered exclamation of Cordoba who was near him: "What the —— I believe you are right! It is the American—but ——"

"Yes, it's me, General," said Dave, with an attempt at jauntiness. "I got away from your folks down yonder. You're better at taking prisoners than you are at holding on to them."

"You got away? When?"

"A few hours before you did. Been hiding out in the mountains."

A voluble explosion in Spanish indicated what Cordoba thought should be done to the men who had permitted this outrage to occur; but Jimenez stopped him, impatiently. The first faint glow of daylight had appeared in the east and he had no time to listen to Cordoba.

"One moment, Cordoba! Now, Señor Sullivan, who is this woman?"

"She's a friend of the Baca family," replied Dave, slowly; instinct warned him that he must not let Jimenez know of Georgia's connection with himself or her knowledge of the raid; there was no

knowing what they might do to her in their anger if they found this out. "She came down here to do something for them and was showing me the way home; we fell in with each other up yonder at the Bacas' goat ranch," he finished. "She's an American woman and it'll pay you to treat her well."

Jimenez looked at Georgia. Though he could not see her plainly there was no mistaking the youthful outline of her figure, and the waving masses of hair tucked under the straw hat. He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Cordoba," he said, "take two men and take these people back to the camp."

Cordoba uttered a faint remonstrance; evidently the thought of giving up the expedition did not appeal to him; but he was silenced by Jimenez, who detached two men from his party, and gave his orders. In another moment, he had wheeled his horse and ridden away, followed by his men. Cordoba, with an impatient exclamation in his native tongue, seized the reins of Georgia's horse, jerking it into the trail. The girl lifted her head angrily.

"Don't touch my horse!" she said, curtly. "Go ahead and I'll follow you." The Mexican, rather surprised, dropped the reins, and touching his horse with his heel, turned into the trail which led back to the cabin.

"This way, then, Señorita," he said, in Spanish,

and gave an order to the two men, who immediately closed in upon Dave, riding one in front and one behind him, with rifles much in evidence.

"I could shoot him in the back if I had my gun," said Georgia to herself, vindictively. "But what good would it do? Those other men are armed, and I've only got two shots left anyhow. What an idiot I was to waste them blazing away at that rabbit!"

Dave, in the meantime, was cursing himself viciously for not having stayed in the goatherd's tent. "I might have known we'd fall in with this bunch; didn't I hear 'em plan to cross at the Gap? Might have known it was this place. Better have run the chance of Jimenez' getting over than to have risked letting her fall into the hands of an ugly brute like this chap!" And he ground his teeth angrily. "Hold on, he's not heading for the camp! Bet a dollar he's going to take us to that cabin that she talked about and keep us there till old Jimenez comes back! Well, that's better than the camp; three to one ain't very good odds, but I've seen worse."

They arrived at the cabin in a very few minutes. Cordoba dismounted and approached Georgia, but she had jumped to the ground unaided. Dave and his two jailors dismounted also and awaited orders.

"You spik Spanish?" Cordoba asked the girl.

"A little," she replied. "I understand it."

"Bueno!" he approved, dropping into it with apparent relief. "Your horse cannot go further to-night. We will stay here for a few hours. Go into the house, please."

Georgia started to go, then turned back. "I can't!" she said, firmly. "I won't go into that dark place alone."

Cordoba stared at her a moment, half angrily, half admiringly, then he threw his bridle reins over his horse's head and entered the cabin. Georgia followed. Dave, closely accompanied by the other two, followed her. In the darkness of the cabin, Georgia hung back a moment; her hand touched Dave's shoulder.

"Dave," she whispered, "give me ——"

"Hush! Here!" and he passed the revolver to her instantly. She seized it and thrust it into the folds of her flannel riding shirt. One of the men, sensing that the prisoners were trying to communicate, administered a kick in the ankle which drove Dave forward with a grunt of pain. In another moment, they were in one of the rooms of the empty cabin, and Cordoba had lighted a couple of candles from the still unextinguished fire. Daylight was coming outside but it gave very little light within the cabin. One of the men threw a log of wood on the fire and putting his hand on Dave's shoulder swung him about and led the way into the

other room, leaving Georgia and Cordoba alone. Dave will never forget, as long as he lives, the tableau made by the half dark room, the ugly, low caste face of Cordoba, and the clear-cut, fine young profile of the girl, with her yellow masses of hair and her blue eyes that followed him desperately as he left the room.

"And I helped her into this," he groaned, as he followed the men into the other room, and watched them as they built up the fire and proceeded to make themselves comfortable.

He seated himself on a broken stool by the fire. His impulse was to throw himself on the two Mexicans and knock their heads together, but his common sense told him that he must be patient. One man, unarmed, could not hope to fight three who were armed. At least, he could be thankful that he had given the girl her revolver, for the first thing the Mexicans had done on getting him alone had been to search him for weapons. He must figure some way to get her out of this—some possible way. The Captain, and his errand, the Mexicans and their raid, all faded into insignificance in his mind compared with this thought.

The two Mexicans, placing themselves between their captive and the open door, hauled out some dice, and sitting on the floor, began to amuse themselves. Fragments of their talk penetrated Dave's

brain, though his mind was fixed upon the other room and he was listening desperately for any sound from there.

"I tell you, idiot," remarked one, indignantly, "that their plan is to take the automobile of Sanders and go to Carrizo."

"Idiot, yourself!" retorted the other. "Are they devils that they can cross the Divide at Angus in an automobile? An airship, you must be thinking of! Ha!"

"Why not? Those automobiles do everything these days. I tell you, they save their horses to make the dash over the border. Myself, I heard the General tell Cordoba when I took in the wood."

"Does the gringo understand Spanish?" with an apprehensive glance at Dave.

"How should I know? What matter if he does? He is thinking of his girl who is with Cordoba." At this they both laughed heartily; it was, indeed, a splendid joke on the gringo.

"If I could get rid of one of them, I could handle the other, and with her gun ——" Dave's mind was running stupidly in circles. "But how I'm going to separate them ——" He heard Georgia's laugh; a little hard, nervous laugh, as far from her natural chuckle as anything could be. "She's stringing him along—game youngster!"

"Cordoba succeeds with the blue-eyed one,"

laughed one of the Mexicans, throwing the dice.

"He has a certain way with women in spite of his ugly face," agreed the other. "Me, I think women are the devil. Give me whiskey or the cards."

"Me, also. No money of mine goes for women. Speaking of money, think you we shall get our share of the loot?"

"Why not? If we do not, my gun shall speak, I tell you!"

"Aha! I hear you. Not when Jimenez is near. Only when he is away does your gun speak, my friend."

"He is a devil," replied the other, disgustedly. "One of these days I shall join Villa. He is hard, it is a word and a blow with Villa, but on the other hand, this Jimenez is as stingy as an old woman. He gets the money, Cordoba gets the women, and the rest of us get the hard work and a drink now and then. Me, I prefer ——"

At this moment, the silence in the other room was broken by a shot—then another. The three men jumped to their feet.

"My God, he's shot her!" cried one.

Dave drew his breath suddenly; a weight seemed off his chest.

"You lie!" he said, fiercely. "She's shot

him and I hope to the Lord she's plugged him good."

"She was armed?" demanded the second man. The other had dashed out of the room to investigate. At the same moment, a shriek rang out in Georgia's voice.

"Dave!" she cried, "Da ——" the sound ceased instantly as though she had been seized by the throat.

The Mexican glanced irresolutely toward the door, but did not budge. Dave's eyes sparkled. Blue eyes are dangerous when they sparkle. He reached out and seized the log which had been put on the fire a few minutes ago. He took it by the unburned end and swung it around once, striking the astonished Mexican on the side of the head with it. Then he dashed out of the room. The Mexican went down like a tree that has been struck by lightning, while the log, still burning, scattered blazing chips on the floor.

In the open doorway of the further room, stood the other Mexican, grinning as he watched the girl, who, panting, and helpless, struggled in the grasp of the infuriated Cordoba. On the floor beside them lay a revolver—Georgia's, and a heavy riding quirt. Dave seized the grinning Mexican by the shoulders and threw him aside.

"You'd better go look after your friend, amigo,

I think he's on fire!" he said, then he landed on Cordoba's back. The latter's hold on the girl relaxed as he turned to see what this mass was that had struck him. At the same time, a howl came from the next room:

"Fire! Mother of God, I burn!" It was too much for the other Mexican; he dashed to his comrade's aid.

"You bet he burns!" snarled Dave, as he fell to the ground, dragging Cordoba with him. "Georgia —run—get out of here!" he panted, but Georgia, white and disheveled, crouched in a corner and did not move. From the next room came the sound of furious stamping, and the smell of pine wood burning. Cordoba swore furiously and struck madly. The two rolled about the place, pulling and tearing at one another. Now one face was uppermost, now the other.

The stamping in the next room grew wilder and was mingled with oaths and groans. Georgia, in her corner, trembled with terror. Suddenly, Dave's body half rose from the heap on the floor, was dragged down, rose again, and the hand seized the riding quirt which lay on the floor, raised it, struck with the loaded handle once—twice—Georgia buried her head in her arms—there was a dull thud as the heavy lead struck and the body of Cordoba sank to the ground. Dave rose dizzily to his feet.

"You would have it, damn you, you've got it!" he muttered as he wiped his forehead on his sleeve. Georgia ran to him.

"He grabbed me and I shot at him—twice—but he caught my wrist! Then he—he struck me with that quirt!" She clung to Dave, half leaning, half supporting. "That was when I screamed—and then he caught me ——" she broke into a torrent of sobs and gasps. Dave steadied himself with a desperate effort.

"I know, girlie, I know," he said. "We must get out of here—quick!"

"Oh, yes, please let's go—oh, you've killed him!" and she swayed unsteadily. Dave caught her in his arms and made for the door.

"I hope so," he said, piously. "If I didn't, I will next time. And I'll never forgive myself for letting you in for this scare—never!"

Georgia tried to smile, but the effort wasn't very successful.

"You didn't—I came myself," she murmured, as he bore her out of the cabin, past the room where the two Mexicans still struggled with the now nearly subdued flames.

"The pinto's tied out here a ways; I watched the greaser when he did it," Dave said. "They meant to start before long, so they didn't turn 'em loose. Now, sister," he continued, when they reached the

horses, "don't make a fuss but just climb up on him because I've had just about enough of that mare of yours and I'm going to leave her behind. I figure these folks owe us a horse for the way they've treated us, so I'll just take this black fellow. See?"

Georgia nodded submissively. "I'd climb up on a camel to get away from this place," she said. "But hurry—those men ——"

"They'll be too busy looking after their burns to bother us just now," replied Dave, contentedly. "And it'll take 'em a while to bring Cordoba around—though I don't think I killed him. His kind aren't killed by a knock on the head; you've got to puncture 'em in a vital spot."

"Please don't talk about killing any more tonight," pleaded the girl. "I guess if I ever get out of this I'm going to be a pacifist. I've seen fighting enough to last me for a while."

"Well, a woman who goes into the bad lands with a pop-gun in her belt is pretty darn near a pacifist," grunted Dave, disgustedly.

It was growing quite light and Georgia could see his face plainly. It looked worn and tired. The girl's heart smote her. "He was really awfully scared about me," she said to herself, with a tearful little lump in her throat. "That's his way of show-

ing it—being cross." She leaned over and touched his hand.

"Dave," she said, bravely, "I guess you know that I appreciate what you did for me, don't you?"

The big man swallowed suddenly, then he put his hand on hers.

"I reckon I do, Georgia," he said, slowly.

A few hours later, one John Glass, forest ranger, on the U. S. side of the border, was busily hanging out his week's washing, when his solitude was broken into by a man and a girl, who dashed wildly up, with a story of bandits and a raid, and demanded the use of his telephone.

"Sure, you can use it," he said, shifting his pipe to the other side of his mouth. "Wouldn't wonder if you were right about that raid. I never put out my wash yet that something didn't happen to take my mind off it," he added, with a genial grin, as he led the way into the cabin.

CHAPTER XVI

ALEC'S STAND

ANGUS, on this bright and auspicious morning, did not at all present the appearance of a community in which unusual events were to occur. The day was calm and sunny, the mountains presented the glorious appearance which a mountain always presents after a heavy rain, every color intensified a hundredfold, while frothy little clouds played about old Nogal's top with the fascinating inconsequence of clouds. Birds sang and bugs buzzed, after the happy manner of birds and bugs in warm weather. Old Bill, the brown horse, escaped from the corral and wandered over the flower beds with the nonchalance of one whose social standing is secure.

Mr. Jeff sat, mail order catalogue spread out before him, and wrestled with the problem of freight rates. Mr. Jeff was an inveterate bargain hunter and spent many valuable minutes figuring freight rates on articles which he did not buy. Out in the yard, Mrs. Patterson was hanging out a clothes-line, much to the joy of a large family of young cats, who evidently regarded the performance as one

staged for their especial benefit. On the front veranda sat Alec Stanley, his hat tipped back, a cigarette in his mouth, and a smile in his eyes. Angus had done much already for Alec Stanley, as was quite evident. It had agreed with him both physically and spiritually. At his feet sat Johnny and Peter Judson, bare-headed, bare-legged, clad in faded overalls, and wrapt in the joy of a great bliss.

"Well, what I want to know is," said Johnny, "was you scared the fust time you went over the top? Awful scared, I mean?"

"I sure was," responded Alec, cheerfully regardless of the pained look in the eyes of his young worshippers.

"Did you sure want to run away?" whispered Peter.

"Didn't I though! Why, I'd have given a house and lot right at that moment, if somebody had yelled—'It's all off! Armistice is signed!'"

"Aw!" The disappointment connected with a slipping ideal appeared on both faces.

"And let me tell you, young men, that if anybody ever tries to make you think that he wasn't scared the first time he went over the top, you can make up your mind to one of two things—either he's lying, or he wasn't there."

"Well," Johnny swallowed hard with excitement, "was them Germans awful big?"

"Big?" Alec chuckled. "Why, youngster, the first time I saw a German coming toward me he looked as big to me as the Statue of Liberty."

"But you didn't run?" anxiously.

"No, Peter, I didn't run. You don't, you know. It wouldn't be playing the game. You've got to play the game, Peter, or you're going to hate yourself a lot more than anybody else will ever hate you."

"I know," Johnny said, sagely. "Like the boys in the Henty books. And Abraham Lincoln and Gineral Grant. My granddad fought with Gineral Grant—Ma said so."

"He was my granddad, too," said Peter, stoutly.

"Yes," conceded Johnny, unwillingly. "But he was mine fust."

Alec laughed loudly and Mrs. Patterson smiled at the sound.

"Ain't that boy picked up a lot out here, though?" she said to the cats. "I'd like to know if he's gone on Georgia! I dunno's he's got git up an' git enough in him for her; but as fur as that goes, I dunno of anybody else around here that's good enough for her. I'm as nervous as a witch every time that Jim Rogers comes around. He's no good on earth, and yet he's got somethin' daredevil about him that girls like. Girls are the biggest fools, anyhow!"

There was a good reason for Alec's cheerfulness this particular morning, however. The school board of Lobo (Hiram Mitchell and the postmaster, Pop Henderson) had accepted Caspar Freund's plans for the hypothetical schoolhouse, and Caspar, borrowing the Phelps horses, had driven over to Carrizo to meet with them and with two Carrizo citizens, to discuss ways and means. It was a little thing, viewed from the height of Alec's former ambitions along the way of architecture, but it meant something, now. Then, too, no one could have witnessed the joy of Caspar and remained unmoved.

"The idea," pronounced Caspar, "vass mine, but the young man haf given me the courage to make it come right. One day you vill see him a beeg architect in spite of dat arm. I haf study in Leipsic und in Heidelberg, und I know."

Caspar's idea had been, like Victoria's, to avoid the red brick horror, and follow the architectural bent of the country, low building, built around a patio. Knowing something, however, of the water situation, he had omitted the drinking fountain for burros. The plan had appealed to Hiram, who had a touch of poetry, witness his second marriage at the age of fifty-six.

In the midst of the conversation between Alec and his two youthful admirers, Uncle Henry Rog-

ers, on his mule, stopped at the gate. He was bound for Lobo, where he would pick up the mail.

"Any letters to go?" he demanded, without dismounting. In truth, the inquiry was apt to be a matter of form, there so seldom were letters. Mrs. Patterson went to the gate and informed him that there were none.

"What's the news down your way?" she said.

Uncle Henry smiled benignly. "Nothin' much, Mis' Patterson," he said. "Only my Jim give us all a supprise yestiddy. Walked off and got married. Yes, ma'am, he shore did."

Mrs. Patterson gasped. Her prophetic mind dangled a dreadful picture before her. She had been much worried by Georgia's non return—suppose ——

"For the Lord's sake, who ——" then, her natural politeness coming to her rescue, "You don't say! Who'd he marry?"

"Sarah Jennings, ma'am. Yes, they made it up, night befo' last, an' fust thing yestiddy mawnin' they was off to Three Rocks to git married. I reckon they'll go on to El Paso, mebbe, for a trip before they settle down an' go to homesteadin'. Makes a man feel old when his children all gits to leavin' home on him—sure does. Giddap!" and Uncle Henry trotted on, leaving Mrs. Patterson, dazed but grateful.

"And mark my words," she said solemnly to Mr. Jeff, to whom she hurried with the news, "there's something fishy about that weddin'. If I was Sarah Jennings, I'd make sure that that preacher was genuine before I went to homesteadin' with Jim Rogers." With which awful thought she returned to her work.

The next interruption to the morning's calm was the jingling of the telephone. Mr. Jeff answered it petulantly.

"Hello! Yes, this is Angus. What? I don't hear you. What? Can't you speak up a little? Who'd you say you was? No, I don't. Can't you speak so's a man kin—what? Oh, Alec, come here and see if you can hear what this numskull's trying to say!" Mr. Jeff laid down the receiver in disgust. Alec Stanley took it up. A woman's voice came over the wire.

"This is Georgia," it said. "I'm in a ranger's cabin over near Mesa. I've been trying for an hour to get you. Has Captain Crowder come back? No? Then listen! There's a party of Mexican bandits who crossed the border last night to raid Carrizo. They went to Texas Park and they'll pick up some machine guns there. They're going to cut the wires, steal Sanders' automobile and go to Carrizo by way of Angus. I've called Carrizo but they won't believe me. I've called the soldiers but they

can't make it in time. Look out for yourselves at Angus. Yes, of course, I know—I saw them. They are ——"

There was a click and then silence. Alec looked up, dazed. Mrs. Patterson, Mr. Jeff, and the boys were at his elbow.

"What is it?" demanded the former. "Is that Georgia? Where is she? What ——"

Alec repeated what he had heard.

"The Lord save us!" Mrs. Patterson was pale. "Peter, child, fetch me a glass of water!"

"She said to watch out, they'd come this way and might be here any minute," continued Alec. "She's called the Carrizo people and they gave her the laugh, I guess."

"The durn fools!" ejaculated Mr. Jeff, wrathfully. "What do they think Georgia's doin'? Playin' April Fool jokes?"

"I don't know what they think, but I know what I'm going to do," said Mrs. Patterson, decidedly. "I'm going to take to the woods. You youngsters better scud home quick."

Alec turned suddenly. "Wait!" he said. "Do you really believe there's going to be a raid?"

"If Georgia Phelps says she seen 'em, she's seen 'em," said Mr. Jeff, solemnly. "That gal's no fool. Crowder's got into trouble, somewhere, and she's come through."

"That's what I think," said Alec, quietly. "And I think they've left Mesa. She said they were going to cut the wires—well, it's my opinion they cut the wire she was talking over, for she stopped in the middle of a sentence."

"My goodness gracious, they're liable to be here any minute!" cried Mrs. Patterson. "The thieving critturs will take everything we've got!"

"Will they take little boys, Mrs. Patterson?" quavered Peter.

"They shan't take you, Peter, for I'll shoot 'em dead if they try," said Johnny, manfully.

"Johnny's got the idea, people," said Alec. "Why should we sit here and let those chaps fall on Carrizo and kill and plunder? Why don't we stop them?"

"Stop 'em?" Mrs. Patterson's voice was indignant. "You and me and that old man and two babies stop fifty murderin' Mexicans bent on blood and deviltry? I guess your shell shock's comin' back, ain't it? Let them Carrizo people stop 'em; I'm goin' to take to the woods. Come along, children."

"The Carrizo people can't stop them. If they've got four machine guns, they can rake Carrizo fore and aft. Ever see a machine gun work, Mrs. Patterson?"

"No, and I don't hanker to," replied that lady.

"Up there on the Divide is what you might call a strategical position," said Alec, his eyes glittering. "Half a dozen people posted behind those rocks could stand off fifty easily, and if these fellows are coming in a car there aren't fifty of them. Don't you see their game? They mean to leave their horses and most of their men at Texas Park, make a dash in the auto, cutting telephone and telegraph wires as they go, plant those machine guns at the important places in Carrizo and loot the town! Why, it's child's play! Do you think we're going to stand that? Mr. Jeff, how many guns are on the place?"

"Wal, I reckon ——" began Mr. Jeff, slowly, when Mrs. Patterson cut in:

"Well, young man, I must say I never expected at my time of life to start in killin' Mexicans. I've nothin' ag'in' Mexicans, most of those I've known have been decent folks though dirty, but if you really think we can stop a raid—why, I've two rifles up at my place, which me and Peter can fire, so I guess we'll just start climbin', like the Southern Colonel, me bein' a little lame and Peter's legs bein' short." And taking Peter by the hand the good lady started bravely up the hill.

"They's two rifles and a couple of pistols here," said Mr. Jeff, "not countin' shotguns. Come on; I ain't so rapid at climbin' hills myself, and if

I've got to beat an autymobile, I want to git started."

A few moments sufficed to collect guns and ammunition, and the party started up the hill.

"Johnny, here, is a fust rate shot," continued Mr. Jeff, puffing laboriously. "And Peter kin load. Mrs. Patterson I don't like the idee of trusting a weepon to, but needs must when the devil drives! I'm sort of worried, now, about Simon Crowder. He ain't the kind to let things hinder him; I reckon Simon's in trouble somewhere."

They were not a militaristic looking party; in fact, they resembled rather a middle class rural family bound for a picnic dinner in the woods. Only the weapons they carried, and the speed they made marked the seriousness of their errand. Mr. Jeff, indeed, urged his rheumatism-stricken legs to a pace which they would probably never accomplish again in this sphere of action. Mrs. Patterson, her face grim and determined, plodded along with something of the majesty with which her forefathers fought at Bunker Hill. Alec, still unacclimated, puffed and panted, but kept up with Johnny and Peter, who led the procession.

"Well," gasped Mrs. Patterson, as she sank down on a rock at the summit of the incline, "I hope they come now while my blood's up. If I have to set an'

cool my heels, I won't have the spunk to shoot a mouse."

Nevertheless, they waited half an hour before they saw anything that looked at all alarming. In the meantime, when the party had got its breath, Alec explained his idea of defence.

"I want you behind that rock, Mr. Jeff, over yonder. I'll take the other one. Peter, you and Mrs. Patterson go further up, to the big rock, see? Johnny, you stay here with me in case I need you. One-armed soldiers aren't very handy with guns. Now, all of you ——"

He was interrupted by Peter's shrill treble.

"Over yonder—there they come—out o' them trees! Over near Big Bear Canyon!"

The party turned with one accord and stared in the direction of Peter's pointing hand. Out of the road about a mile away shot a big touring car; for a moment it was lost to sight as it plunged through a patch of road where the trees grew closely, then again it came into sight.

"It's them!" said Mr. Jeff, awed.

Alec's eyes shone; he drew his breath hard; the old excitement that he had never expected to feel again was with him; he gave his orders as though no one could dream of disobeying them, consequently no one did. He, who had been tossed aside

as of no account, was going to take a hand in the game again!

"You youngsters listen to me," he continued. "You're to lie low and do as you're told and not to fire until I tell you—then blaze away."

"Alec Stanley," Mrs. Patterson's voice came in a shaky manner from behind her rock. "Do you mean to tell me that you're going to shoot right into that automobile without knowing a thing about those people? They may be a bunch of prospective investors for all you know!"

"No, I don't. I'm going to halt 'em and give 'em a chance to back off. If they don't, we'll plug 'em. They won't be ready to fire the machine guns; we'll get some of them sure; if we don't, of course, they'll get us. Now's the time if anybody wants to quit. How about it, Johnny?"

"No, siree, I'm stayin'," replied that youngster, boldly.

"Well, get your head down or you won't be staying long," replied his commander. "Anybody else who wants to quit?"

"Huh?" Mr. Jeff's voice had degenerated into a wheezy growl. "Quit? Why, we ain't only just come!"

"Well, I didn't want to come and the Lord knows I don't want to go, but it's an awful thing to fire a gun at a human being—skunks is all I've killed up

to date. Scrouge down, Peter; if they see an ear of you they'll shoot it off." Mrs. Patterson's accents were pessimistic in the extreme. "Mebbe you'd better light out while there's time."

"There ain't time—she's climbin' the Divide now —I hear her chug," said Peter, excitedly.

"Sit tight and wait till I give the word," breathed Alec.

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied the loyal admirer of Henty at his side.

By this time the sound of the machine could be distinctly heard. Up, up it came, traveling cautiously the zigzag road, visible only when it made the abrupt turns and seemed about to plunge off the narrow path. The car, which was a big one, held ten or a dozen Mexicans. They were crowded into the tonneau, in front, and even on the footboard. The four machine guns were packed in between them, while each man held a rifle. Jimenez, himself, drove.

As the car emerged upon the last incline, Alec stood up and called loudly, at the same time keeping Jimenez covered with his revolver:

"Halt!"

There was silence for a moment. The car did not stop, but it slowed a trifle. There was an oath in Spanish from one of the men.

"It's no use, Jimenez, we know who you are and

what you're after," continued Alec. "Back that machine! If you come on, we'll fire."

Jimenez was a man who seldom lost his temper, but this sudden and most unexpected onslaught from a clear sky was too much. He swore angrily.

"Señor," he said, "I don't know who you are but you'd better get out of the way. We're crossing that Divide—now!" and a quick order in Spanish was hurled over his shoulder. A rifle was leveled at Alec, who stood his ground.

"There are too many of us, Jimenez," he said; "we're going to get you. Better go back while you can." He dropped suddenly as he saw the Mexican back of Jimenez move his trigger-finger. "Ready, men, he's coming!" he cried.

"Aye, aye," murmured Johnny, "let the durn skunk come!"

Jimenez put his foot on the accelerator and in spite of the cruel grade the machine responded nobly. The men in the car, terrified by the speed at such a height, scarcely had the pluck to use their rifles, indeed, some of them ducked unceremoniously.

"Fire!" Alec's voice rang out clearly and was followed by five shots. One man screamed and dropped his gun, shot in the shoulder. Another crumpled up and sank back without a sound. Those who could use their rifles returned the fire,

but the defenders of the Divide clung to their shelters. Jimenez pushed the car to its utmost capacity. In another second he would be over the top—he was over! Five more shots rang out and this time three went home. Johnny, jumping up in his excitement, got a bullet in the calf of his leg and fell back quite as suddenly as he had risen. Mrs. Patterson screamed and fired wildly, hitting the car and boring a hole in its side, but the machine with Jimenez unharmed bolted down the decline. In a moment, it was lost to view by a turn in the road.

"If that reckless devil don't get his for goin' down that road at that speed, there's nothing in the law of gravity!" gasped Mrs. Patterson, excitedly. "Johnny, child, come here this minute and let me look at that leg!"

"How many you reckon we got?" demanded Mr. Jeff, rising to his feet with much difficulty.

"About four or five; not enough to stop them, I'm afraid," replied Alec, gloomily. "Still, we did what we could. Now, the thing to do is to get back to the house and 'phone Carrizo again."

"Don't need to go back to the house. There's a telephone at the mill," said Mr. Jeff. "And we kin take the boy into Mrs. Patterson's and bandage him up some. Hurt much, Bub?"

"Naw!" replied Johnny, disdainfully. In fact, the bullet had but grazed the leg, and Johnny had

been wounded much more severely with the family shotgun while out with Peter after quail. Still, as a bona fide wound, made by a live bandit, it would probably stand high among the annals of the Judson family.

"Well," said Mrs. Patterson, when Carrizo had been telephoned, and Susie Fuller, now fully alive to the reality of the raid, had undertaken to alarm the town, "we've done our best to save 'em, but if folks won't believe anything they hear and act like Noah's friends did when he invited 'em into the ark, they'll have to take what's comin' their way. Anyhow, I've made up my mind why Jim Rogers was in such a hurry to marry Sarah Jennings; he knew this thing was comin', and he wanted to get out of the way. I never did care much for Sarah, but I will say I think she's too good to be used for an alibi!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE GIRL FROM NEW YORK

WHILE the garrison at Angus was arming itself to fight Jimenez, a mountain wagon with four horses, driven by a gray-haired little man, came slowly along the road from Carrizo to Angus. On the back seat sat two women, both young, one dark-eyed and determined looking, the other, blonde and fluffy, with a countenance in which excitement struggled with gloom. They were Victoria Dunlap and the faithful Rhoda.

Rhoda's gloom was not without its excuse. The two had arrived at Carrizo early in the morning, frankly, at two o'clock; and Carrizo at two o'clock in the morning is a place which needs an indulgent eye to make it beautiful to the stranger. No one had met them at the station, and no one had offered to carry their suitcases to the hotel which they had to find for themselves. Rhoda's fears had been equally divided between the fear of Indians and that of Mexican bandits; neither happening along, Silas Thompson, the proprietor of the hotel, who

appeared in shirt and trousers hastily assumed, was quite enough to discomfit her.

Honest Silas, who put the two down in his mind as the advance guard of a show, ushered them politely into a room with two beds, and then returned comfortably to his own. The night train seldom dropped passengers at Carrizo, so Silas did not attempt to keep the hotel open after midnight. An all night lunch counter connected with the establishment, and run principally for the convenience of railroad employees, attended to most of the demands made after that hour.

Victoria eyed the room and chuckled amusedly. It was just as small, as bare, as unattractive as she had expected, and Victoria was one who liked things to turn out as she expected them to.

"Don't undress," she said to Rhoda, with a grin; "that door, I've discovered, doesn't lock. We'll lie down as we are till daylight, and then I'll find a way for us to get over to Angus. Angus is the place where we're going, I forgot to tell you."

"Then we ain't to stop here, Miss Victoria?" Rhoda said, hopefully.

"Good gracious, of course not. Why in the world should we stop here?" replied Victoria, throwing off her shoes and sinking down on the bed comfortably.

"Is Angus a bigger place than this?" inquired

the maid, cautiously, as she propped a chair under the door-knob.

"Bigger? No, indeed, smaller, much smaller. Now, Rhoda, put out the light—I want to sleep."

To herself she said, as she turned over comfortably, "I'm just as happy as a clam. It doesn't matter whether Alec wants me or not—he's got to have me now! This is what I like—doing as I please. I wouldn't wonder if I liked this country after all—I like the air—and I rather like that funny man with his trousers and suspenders festooned about him like drapery—I like ——" but here Victoria, like the healthy young thing that she was, dropped off to sleep.

The occupant of the other bed did not go to sleep as quickly. She, too, was ruminating. "She's a nut—that's what she is! If I'd had any notion that we were comin' to a hick place like this I'd have given her notice so quick it would of made her head swim! Putting the light out, too, in this awful joint, with a door that don't lock. If I ever get back to little old New York, I guess I'll know when I'm in luck."

Morning had not improved matters much in Rhoda's eyes, though she admitted that the sunshine was nice. A rather dreadful breakfast, followed by an hour spent sitting in the office—the hotel boasted no other place to sit—while Victoria

hunted up ways and means of getting to Angus, had depressed her greatly. Nor had the polite attentions of Mrs. Thompson helped much. That lady, with an idea of offering entertainment to a guest who seemed bored, had given her a glowing account of Georgia's telephone message just received at the Sheriff's office next door.

"And you mean to tell me that the folks in this town are going to sit still and let those Mexicans raid 'em and not do nothing?" Rhoda's voice was horror stricken.

"Raid? Why, bless you, child," chuckled fat Mrs. Silas, "there won't be any raid. We never have raids in this part of the country—it's over in the Big Bend where those things happen. Georgia Phelps has seen something that's scared her and she's imagined the rest."

"But Angus? Ain't that where we're going? Miss Victoria, this lady says them bandits are coming by way of Angus in an auto! Suppose we meet them?"

"But suppose we don't!" said Victoria, who had just come along. "Why look always on the dark and painful side, Rhoda? I've just had such a piece of luck! I've met the nicest old gentleman who is driving to Angus right away and he's going to take us along. So run along and pack up while I pay the bill."

Rhoda grappling with the suitcases might have been heard to mutter ominously: "She's a nut—that's what she is. Folks that have so much money can't be expected to have sense, too, I suppose. Well, if I get out of this alive, I'll be doin' well. I'll say I will!"

Thus it was that Caspar Freund, delighted to oblige friends of the Phelps family, happened to be driving two handsome young women up the road toward the Divide, just as Jimenez and his friends were nearing it from the other side.

Approached upon the subject of possible bandits, Caspar had been less optimistic than Mrs. Thompson. They had never had border raids in the neighborhood, he said, but one could never tell. Mexico was in an unsettled state and there were rough customers everywhere, on this side as well as the other. It seemed probable that Georgia had been frightened by something; he was more alarmed for her than for anyone else. Girls, in his opinion, were better at home than traveling about in bad places; a sentiment in which Rhoda heartily concurred. It was just at this moment that Victoria leaned over, touched Caspar on the shoulder, and pointed:

"Look—up there—the top of the Divide! There's shooting going on—and there's a machine. It's those Mexicans sure enough!"

Caspar looked. They had been driving about two hours and were approaching the ascent to the Divide. The automobile containing Jimenez and his men had just passed through the fire of the guns of Alec and his party. While the sound of the shooting was faint, it was unmistakable, as was of course the smoke from the guns of both parties. The automobile disappeared, hidden by a curve in the road.

"Bandits!" gasped Caspar. "It iss by all means them!" And he leaned over and touched the lead horses with the whip.

Victoria's eyes sparkled. Little shivers of excitement were going up and down her back. "Can they see us, do you think?" she demanded, eagerly.

"Not vile dey makes dose curves," replied Caspar, still urging the horses. "Dere iss so many more of trees on dose side of the Divide. That is for why I make speed. De one cut-off on dis road iss a quarter of a mile furder on—ve must make it before dose madmens dash into us."

"But, Mr. Freund," continued Victoria, more and more excitedly, "they're coming to raid the town, aren't they? To shoot and burn and—all the rest of it?"

"If they can, most surely so. Git up, you Snap, up, I say!"

"Well, do you mean to tell me you're going to

let them do it? Shoot men down with machine guns, and hurt women, and carry off children?" Victoria's eyes blazed.

"But, my dear Mees, how can I help it?"

"Help it? Easy enough, I should say. You see that corner, that curve? They'll have to come around that, won't they? Well, let's draw this heavy old wagon right across the road, take out the horses and us, of course, and let 'em come right bang into it? Unless they're going a whole lot slower than they were up there, they'll go into the ditch as sure as anything."

"Mein Gott, vot a voman!" Caspar's voice was awed. "And the vagon? Mr. Phelpses vagon?"

"Oh, my gracious, I'll buy the wagon!" Then, seeing the incredulous expression on the old man's face, "Tell him, Rhoda, that I've got money enough to buy the wagon."

"She's got enough to buy the whole state if she feels like it," said Rhoda, excitedly. "And it ain't her fault if she's nuts, she was raised that way. Oh, for goodness' sake, let's do something! They'll be here in a minute."

"Stop the horses and do as I say!" commanded Victoria, with one foot out of the wagon. "I won't have that cute little town raided by Mexicans just to save the price of a wagon!"

It is possible that Caspar despaired of getting to

the cut-off in time, or it may be that like others before him, he did not think quickly enough to say "no" to Victoria Dunlap. At all events, he stopped the horses. On one side of the road the ground fell away steeply into an arroyo, while on the other rose the hillside. It was an ugly place to meet anything on wheels. Caspar turned the wagon cleanly across the road and the three hastily descended.

With trembling fingers, the two girls helped the old man to unharness the four horses, expecting every minute to hear the sound of the automobile's approach. Rhoda, whose courage revived with occupation, removed the suitcases and packages from the wagon. The next thing was to coax the amazed horses into the arroyo. Here again, Rhoda, who had never touched any species of horse livelier than the milkman's faithful animal, rose nobly to the occasion, and seizing the reluctant Snap by the bridle, led him after the others.

"It's not that I'm any more afraid than she is, it's just that I've got more sense," she muttered. "Come on, you! You don't have to step all over me, you know."

"There! Even if he sees the wagon in time to slow up, it will gain time," panted Victoria, as they plodded through the rocky depths of the arroyo. "Those Carrizo people may wake up and send for

the soldiers. There must be a border fort nearer than Fort Bliss, isn't there?"

Caspar replied that there was but that even allowing for their coming in motors they could not possibly get there in time to save Carrizo. He proposed for themselves that they get out of the arroyo as soon as possible and strike across to Lobo which was not more than a couple of miles off and where there was a telephone by means of which both Carrizo and the fort could be reached. This was agreed to by the other two, and, piling up the suitcases behind a convenient rock, they pushed on.

In the meantime, the big touring car, with its cargo of rather scared Mexicans, swung down the incline. Its speed was indicative of the anger of its driver. Jimenez was furious at the turn of events. Angus had been warned, by whom he could not imagine, unless there had been treachery at Texas Park. That was it. Jim Rogers had turned against him and given the game away. Carrizo would be armed and ready, instead of helpless and unprepared. Jimenez cursed the world and the absent bridegroom.

Like many people who exercise habitual control over their tempers, he was dangerous when that control was broken. He would go on, he would do what he had started to at all costs. With four

machine guns and plenty of ammunition, it would be strange, indeed, if a town of Carrizo's type could stop him. Despite the protests of the wounded and the scared, Jimenez drove the car down the long incline at a speed which harmonized with his mood.

The descent was less steep on this side of the Divide and the curves were fewer and much less sharp. The car jolted and bounced its reckless way toward the last curve, turned it on two wheels, and came out on the main road. Then Jimenez saw—too late—the old mountain wagon drawn across the narrow road. It was too late to stop, and there was no room to pass or to turn, and this was the real reason why the Carrizo raid went wrong, and why, instead of descending upon that unbelieving town in a whirlwind of auto and bullets, the big touring car lay on its side, half-way over into the arroyo, with seven dead and injured pinned beneath it, while five, Jimenez among them, crawled away into the underbrush and started to foot it home to Mexico.

Later in the day, when the Lobo doctor, accompanied by an impromptu posse, roused to action by the story of Caspar and the two girls, rode over to view the scene of the disaster, they found four of the seven Mexicans alive and not vitally injured. The dead were those who had already suffered severely from the bullets of Alec and his party.

In the afternoon, Mr. Jeff and Alec Stanley were seated on the veranda at Angus, discussing the situation. A later message from Carrizo had informed them that the raid had not taken place, though no one seemed to know exactly why. Something had happened; either the injuries inflicted upon the bandits by the Angus people had been more serious than they thought, or Jimenez had decided to give up the expedition when he found that he was expected. A wild message, Susie Fuller said, had come in from Lobo about some people who had seen the bandits, but the connection had been so poor that the Carrizo people had not been able to make much out of it.

"I don't like Georgia's wanderin' around alone," said Mr. Jeff, gloomily. "It looks to me like Crowder's met with trouble."

"It does," was the reply. "It looked like trouble to me when they started off. A girl like Georgia ought to know better than to go off on a wild goose chase like that."

"Girls don't never have much sense," remarked the elder pessimist. "They don't git sense till they're old girls, and then they don't need it. As fur Simon Crowder, he'd go anywhere he thought there might be good fightin'. He'd ruther fight than eat. I uster be somewhat that way myself till I growed fat."

"Women are so pigheaded!" insisted the younger man, in irritation. "They want to do a thing, and they'll twist everything on earth to make it seem the right thing to do. Now, you take a man—why, a man knows when there's no use bucking against fate, or whatever you want to call it. He'll say he's beaten and take his medicine, but a woman ——" he paused; it was a pause freighted with reminiscence.

"They like to have their way," agreed Mr. Jeff. "I dunno's I remember ever havin' my way with a woman when her way happened to be dif'runt. No, sir, I don't."

"I did—once," said Alec, thoughtfully, "but I guess I've wished sometimes that I hadn't," he added, with a whimsical smile.

"She put one over on you after all, did she?" sympathetically. "Well, they're sharp, and now that they've got the vote, they'll prob'ly raise the devil."

A discordant motor horn broke in on this pleasing thought, and, looking up, they saw an army truck picking its way carefully down the Divide.

"The soldiers! They've caught Jimenez and are on their way to Texas Park!" cried Alec, jumping to his feet.

"Don't look to me like they had any Mexicans

in that outfit," said Mr. Jeff, whose vision, as we have said before, was unimpaired. "They's a woman on that front seat."

"They've stopped at the mill and brought Mrs. Patterson along, I suppose," replied Alec, carelessly.

Thus it was that when the motor truck swung up to the gate, and a good-looking young lieutenant helped a small, dark-eyed person down from the front seat, Alec was utterly unprepared for what happened. For the black-eyed lady ran lightly up the path, threw both arms around his neck and held him tight.

"Alec!" she cried. "Oh, Alec!"

"Victoria!" Alec, dazed, held her as tightly as one may with one available arm, but she extricated herself and turned with a little laugh to the young officer.

"Mr. Howard," she said, "this is Mr. Stanley, of whom I spoke to you; and this, I think, must be Mr. Jefferson, isn't it? Oh, never mind how we happened to come—Rhoda is here somewhere, so you see I didn't come alone—the main thing is that the bandits didn't raid Carrizo after all." Then as she paused for breath and Alec seemed too much astonished to speak, Lieutenant Howard told of the bandit escapade.

"It really was the most sporting thing I ever

knew of an elderly gentleman and two girls pulling off," he said, admiringly.

"Oh, well, somebody had to do something, and it occurred to us—that's all," replied Victoria, easily. "The worst of it is that quite a lot of them got away. They've ordered out the cavalry to comb the countryside, I believe."

"They'll get away, of course," said the Lieutenant. "They always do; but it gives us a handle against that Texas Park crowd. We're bound for there, now. Adios!" And Rhoda and Caspar having alighted, the truck went on its way.

"The soldiers stopped at Lobo and picked us up or we never would have gotten here," continued Victoria. "It was sheer luck. They got our baggage back for us, too."

Alec turned with shining eyes to Mr. Jeff. "This is Miss Victoria Dunlap, a friend of Mr. Farmer's," he said. "And you were right, Victoria, this is Mr. Jeff."

"Oh, I've heard all about Mr. Jeff from—from Mr. Farmer!" Victoria swallowed hastily. Her eager tongue had nearly slipped and given Georgia away.

Mr. Jeff smiled what was intended to be an agreeable, not to say fascinating smile.

"If you're a friend of Frederick Farmer's, I'm right glad to meet you," he said. "I guess it's

about time for me to be moseyin' over to feed them chicks, Caspar; suppose you come over and tell me the details of that little wreckin' adventure of yourn." And the two old men, looking very sly, walked across the road to the corral. The two young people, followed by Rhoda, walked up the path to the house, where the latter, carrying the rescued suitcases, went inside. Rhoda was a tactful young person and it had just dawned upon her why she had been dragged out to New Mexico.

"Victoria, you're a wonder, but why did you do it?" Alec looked into the black eyes longingly but firmly.

"Do what?" innocently. "Upset those Mexicans, or compromise you in the eyes of the U. S. Army?"

"No, why did you come? Oh, you know well enough how glad I am to see you! You know just exactly how hungry I was to see you, but, what's the use?"

"Alec," replied Victoria, demurely, "there's always a use in going after the thing you want. If you go after it hard enough you're likely to get it." She seated herself comfortably and took off her hat. Alec flung himself down at her feet.

"You don't want it, Victoria, you know you don't."

"Alexander, I've always known what I wanted;

that's been one of my shining characteristics, ever since I was born; and it's nearly always been good for me to have it."

"It isn't this time, and it wouldn't be good for me, either. You know how much I care for you, Victoria; well, I could hate you just as much as I love you, if I had to live on your money. There, I've told you the truth."

Victoria's lip trembled and she spoke more seriously than was her wont.

"Alec, you've an awful lot of the savage in you, for a man who's been brought up in good society for half a dozen generations. I often wonder how it's lasted so long. Now, with me, it's different. I'm primitive, of course; there's only Father between me and the man who made his money chopping down trees up in Michigan. I suppose that's why I can do things like—well—like upsetting those brown men in that automobile. I'm primitive enough to be able to weigh the two evils, killing them, or letting them kill a lot of helpless women and children, and to act accordingly and not worry about it afterward. But I'm not cruel. There's a touch of cruelty in you; it's refined cruelty, but it's cruel just the same."

"Perhaps;" stubbornly. "But I think it would be more cruel to ——"

"To take advantage of my youth and innocence

and marry me for my money? But, Alec, suppose I didn't have any money?"

Alec looked up suddenly. "D'you mean to say that Ephraim H. is busted?" he demanded, with a grin.

"No, I do not," replied Victoria, sternly; "I mean that I might be persuaded, for a consideration, to separate myself from my millions, after paying for Mr. Phelps' wagon, and live on your salary, if you only had one, Alec, dear!"

"Victoria, you're a good sport and I'm going to make you a sporting proposition. Do you care enough for me to marry me and live in Carrizo? Our plans, Caspar's and mine, for a schoolhouse in Lobo have gone through. Of course they haven't any money to build, but it's given me a sort of standing out here. Suppose I open an office in Carrizo, will you marry me and live on what I earn?"

"Alec, that's an awful thing to ask of a woman! Did you really see Carrizo? Look it in the eye, so to speak?"

"I did."

"And it struck you as a place where a man could live and support a wife?"

"Lots of them do. Of course, she'd have to be a sensible girl."

"Alec, the poor thing would have to be so sen-

sible that she wouldn't be a girl at all! But I will —I will—so there!"

Alec took the hand that hung down by her side and kissed it.

"Victoria, I do believe you're in love with me. I never did before. I thought it was one of your whims, marrying me. That you liked the shape of my chin, perhaps, or the way I parted my hair, and all that sort of thing. But any girl who will give up what you're giving up, and come to a place like Carrizo on a chance, must be in love—there's no other explanation!"

"Well, I'm glad I've convinced you. No, don't kiss me, please; those two old men are standing over there watching and pretending not to. Where is it your idea that we're to live? At the hotel or in one of those nice little shacks down by the station?"

"Victoria, you're a trump! I didn't mean it, of course. I couldn't earn a living out here. What I mean to do is to go back to my old job in New York. They offered it to me, you know, but I was too much discouraged and down in the mouth to take it. Somehow, you and Georgia Phelps have put life into me. But you've got to promise and vow that you won't let Ephraim H. butt into the family with any of his money."

"Of course not," promised Victoria, glibly. "He wouldn't think of it. You've no idea what tact

Father has. No, please don't—Rhoda is looking out of the window!"

"I don't care if she is. You gave the whole show away anyhow when you landed." And Alec had his way for once.

"I don't suppose," said Victoria, a few minutes later, "that you will object to my building that schoolhouse at Lobo? I promised Mr. Freund that I would, and I couldn't bear to disappoint the old dear."

"Of course not. Why should I?"

"Oh, I don't know; you've such a complex nature. If you were only a simple soul like me, Alec, not caring a thing about money or clothes or any of those things!"

"Vic, dear, to be as simple a soul as you, one would have to have been raised on millions as you have been. You don't know what you're talking about. By the way, how did you know where I was—Farmer?"

Victoria nodded sweetly.

"You didn't—I mean, Georgia didn't ask you to come?" suspiciously.

"Why, what an idea, Alec, dear! How could she? She doesn't even know me. Tell me, what is Georgia like? Didn't you feel a little like falling in love with her?"

"No, of course not," innocently. "She's a

bully girl, but why should I fall in love with her?"

"Oh, I don't know. People do, sometimes, fall in love with bully girls, don't they? What's she doing around the border seeing Mexicans?"

"That," replied Alec, "is, as somebody said, another story. Come into the house where those two old men can't stare and I'll tell you all about it."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HOME TRAIL

It was growing dark when two riders of two weary horses turned the corner of the road half a mile below Angus. They were Georgia Phelps and Dave Sullivan, and they had been riding since noon from the ranger's cabin. The tired horses dropped from the fox trot into a walk as they struck the incline. The hearts of the riders were light, however, for they had stopped at the Judson place, seen the heroic Johnny, and learned the news of the failure of the Jimenez raid, and the coming of the soldiers. They left John Glass, who had accompanied them thus far, at the Judsons' for the night. They also heard the story of Victoria's successful coup.

"So although I didn't bring the Baca children over, I don't feel discouraged," Georgia said. "I think Anita will manage to get them over, now that she knows I'll look after them. If I only knew that Captain Crowder was all right ——"

"Don't you worry about him," replied her companion. "The Captain's a wise old fox and he'll show up before long. If he don't, we'll have your

friend, Mr. Farmer, take it up with Washington; if I had 'Maria,' safe and sound, I'd go after him, myself. If I had 'Maria' I'd feel a heap more like going back to San Antone," he finished, ruefully.

"You're not going back right away!" protested Georgia. "You turned down my invitation to dinner once, Mr. Dave Sullivan, and you shan't do it again. I want you to see Angus and Mr. Jeff and Mrs. Patterson and ——"

"Of course, I'm figurin' to spend the night with you folks," said Dave. "I want to see about gettin' this nag back to Ortega—I reckon the poor greaser needs him all right. And then—well, of course, I was figurin' to come back, maybe, and make you a bit of a visit if you'll let me sometime."

"Yes," said the girl, quietly. "That will be very nice." But she did not look at him as she said it, and something had gone out of her voice, making it rather lifeless, not like Georgia's voice. The two tired horses jogged along close together in the darkness.

"You see," continued Dave, slowly, "I'm rather a rough sort of a chap, not much used to visiting young ladies like you. I haven't much education, though I do read things when I can get 'em. But I'm not like this army boy that's staying with you. He's college bred, I suppose, isn't he?"

"Yes," replied Georgia. "He is. He's a mighty

fine fellow, Alec is, and I guess Victoria Dunlap will make him awfully happy."

"You mean ——"

"I mean the girl who upset Jimenez. Alec is engaged to her. That's why she came out here." Earnestly Georgia hoped she was telling the truth.

"You mean that they're—they're engaged to be married?"

"Yes."

"Then he isn't—I mean, you aren't—oh, what's the use of being polite and beating around the bush with things like that? What I mean is, you're not in love with him?"

"No," said Georgia, quietly, "I'm not."

Dave cleared his throat nervously, then leaned toward the girl eagerly: "Do you suppose, Georgia, that you could—could like me?"

"Well," replied Georgia, in her most matter-of-fact manner, and, the night being dark, the Killarney eyes could not spoil its gravity; "I don't know, Dave, but I think I'd rather like to try."

"Do you mean that, honest—Georgia, do you mean—you don't know me very well—there are a lot of things you don't know about me!"

"Yes," said the girl, softly, "but I think I know the things that count. Don't I?"

Dave drew her as close as he could. "I believe

you do—honest, I do!" he said. "I haven't got much to offer you, either, but I'll work for you. Later on, when I've saved up something, if you say so we'll get some land ——"

"Oh, Dave!" All the life had come back to the girl's voice again. "That's what I wanted you to say—that some day we could homestead some place together. It doesn't seem to me that I could stand living in cities after all this—I love it so. I love the little towns like Carrizo and all the dear people and ——" she was clinging to him as she spoke, for two horses can really walk very closely together when they try.

"I know, girlie, I know. I couldn't stand it in the big places, either. And flying's no life, I suppose, for a married man."

"No, it is not," was the decided response. "I'm not brave and I couldn't bear having you up there all the time. I'm not nearly as brave as Victoria Dunlap."

"You're brave enough for me. What made you think that you could like me, honey?"

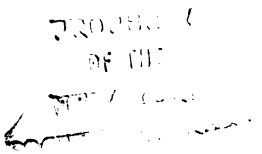
"Well, when I saw you come in the doorway of the Baca tent I sort of suspected that I could," murmured the lips so close to his. "And every minute of the time since then the suspicion has been growing on me rapidly. You're the kind of man I like and that's enough for me."

And so I leave my four young people about to embark on what is perhaps the greatest risk of their careers, for what are the risks of surreptitious border trips, aeroplane accidents, or even angry bandits compared with those of matrimony? They have, however, stood by each other through some rather trying experiences and I have a feeling that their chances of happiness are good. Georgia and Victoria have become fast friends and to this day Alec Stanley does not know to what he owed Victoria's sudden visit. Victoria, herself, is much occupied these days in planning a studio for interior decorating which she expects to put on a paying basis and is trying to persuade her fiancé to go into partnership with her. Architecture, she feels, is a worthy field but slow. I do not think that Alec will consent, for he is doing well at his profession in spite of the handicap under which he labors.

Captain Crowder's liberation from the enforced hospitality of the officer in charge of the Mexican forces in Capitan was not as easily obtained as his friends had hoped for. It came, finally, partly through the offices of Fred Farmer, who took the matter to the State Department, and partly because of the increasing distaste of the officer to the Captain's company. The latter, being not only fiendishly lucky but exceedingly skilful in all

games of chance, had tolerably well cleaned out the entire Mexican population of Capitan by the time his release came and he retired with the glories of a conqueror.

As for Texas Park, when the soldiers arrived there, they found that a fight had taken place between the deserters who had been left there by Jimenez after he had taken the guns, and the remaining bandits, in which Sanders had been killed —also two of the deserters. The rest had escaped and had presumably joined Jimenez and those of his men who had escaped death in the automobile. Jim Rogers is at present serving a sentence in Leavenworth—a shorter one than he deserves, owing to the fact that Dave's evidence failed to prove direct complicity between him and Jimenez in the matter of raiding Carrizo. The machine guns were found beneath the automobile, comparatively unhurt, but poor "Maria" will never fly again.

Dave is still in the air service but expects to leave it when he marries. He has his eye on a ranch not many miles from Angus. He is very popular with Mr. and Mrs. Phelps, who agree with Georgia that he is the "kind of man that they like." The little Baca boys like him too. They play around at Angus under the watchful eye of Mr. Jeff, who has in a manner adopted them. They do not forget however

that their home is across the border and they long for the day when that unhappy country, Mexico, will be a safe and happy land for small boys to live in.